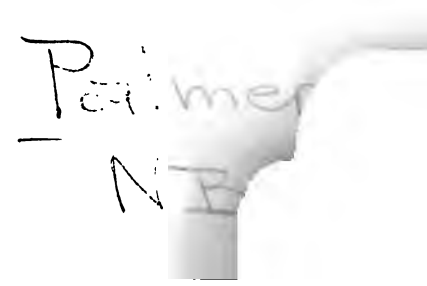
Marian

A Story of the South

Mary A. Palmer



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BY

MARY A. PALMER

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PREFACE

In the South before the Civil War, in dear old Louisiana, lived the family of the Meridiths, on the old plantation on the Teche. The house was a great, rambling one, with a hall in the center, and everywhere generous fireplaces, wherein the bright logs blazed in winter. Upon entering any of the rooms, the warm greeting of the glowing coals would cheer the comer, while coquettish little flames would stretch out eager, beckoning fingers in welcome. The Meridiths always spent the Christmas holidays on the old plantation, and no friend that had the good fortune to be invited there was ever known to send regrets.

Again, regularly as the summer came around, the family returned to the mansion on the Teche, there to spend the long summer holidays, when the place presented a new aspect. At this season magnolia, cape jasmine, and fragrant honeysuckle mingled their perfume in the soothing Southern air.

Then, too, in the sunlight gleamed the white-washed cabins of the negroes, each cabin having its patch of ground, which the old mammies had cultivated, and on which grew all kinds of vegetables. After the day's work in the cotton field it was mammy's delight to welcome home her "old man" and the rest of her family, and regale them with her steaming coffee, corn-bread, and ham knuckle. All would gather round the table in the cabin to discuss the labor of the day; and later the moonlit night air would be filled with sweet voices, blending in soft, rich melody, as tune after tune was sung to the accompaniment of the banjo. There is no music so sweet and so weird as the singing of the negro.

The Meridith negroes were happy then,—free from care, with good owners to protect them and minister to their needs. However, all masters and mistresses were not like these; and after the writing of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" even the negroes on this old plantation began to feel that they, too, were not kindly used.

I blush to say that in many instances the cruelty related in that book of Harriet Beecher Stowe's was really practiced. Adjoining the Meridiths' place was the plantation of Monsieur B. It was a pretentious home, and its master owned many slaves; but what a contrast was their life to that of the Meridiths' negroes! Monsieur B. was a cruel master, whose story

my old nurse told me many times, in the days before the war; and from having heard it so frequently, I feel that it is correctly impressed upon my mind.

"Monsieur B.'s only daughter lived in New Orleans, married to a Mister D. One of de wed-din' presents dat her Par gwine give her was a very pretty yaller gal. Dat chile was so light dat a person could hardly tell her from white. When her missus came to see yur Mar she would bring her with her to stand behin' her missus's chair to fan her. Dat gal would sail by us niggers, with her head up in the air, jus' lak she was Cleoparita.

"I says to her one day:

" 'Look here, gal; you needn't be so hufty. You is a nigger same as us, even if you has white blood.' Den, chile, all her chilliness and high air melt away.

" 'White blood—white blood, you say. I cusses de day. I is neider white nor black,—not your race nor de race of my missus. But let me tell you: My missus and me,—my missus dat I have to serve,—are of de same father.'

"Dat, chile, is de innickity of Hell. Dat is de story Puss told me. It 'minds me of dat yaller gal, Carry, dat Old Legree had. Well, Puss's Mar was maid for her missus, Mrs. G.

"One day one of de servants come to de house and said: 'Missus, Diana got her baby.' Mrs. B. hurried to de cabin to see Diana's baby.

Diana turned back de bed clothes and showed de baby to her missus wid great pride. De old missus, wid her mouf a-gappin', said: 'Diana, how come dat baby so white?' 'I tell you, Missus; it was awfully hot weather when I was a-carryin' dat chile, and, you see, she is a hefty chile. I jes naturally did wish for snow; so I rec'on I done marked her, an' she come white.' 'Yes,' said her missus, heart-brokenly; 'and I s'pose you were smelling violets all the time; that is how come the baby's eyes are blue.'

"My old man say dat masters like Monsieur B. reads de Bible upsidedown; leastways, de only part dey do remember is: 'Go ye and multiply.' Honey Chile, dat baby was Puss,—de weddin' present. Chile, dat was not like your Par. He bought me from a cruel master dat separated me from my old man and sold my babies. And I ain't never seen dem agin. Dey tore de baby from my breast, and de others hung on to my apron and did not know what was to 'come of dem. I cried: 'Take all of my babies, but leave me my old man!' My old master said, 'No, nigger; I need him. You are sold. Go with your new master.'

"When your Par bought me I said: 'Master, find me my old man. You ain't goin' to get any good outer dis nigger widout my poor old man.' Well, Honey, de man, like you read me about in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' was like de one dat got old Edmond. He used to say, 'I fats

my black calfs for a good market.' One day your Par was passin' down Royal Street, and saw a gang of niggers for sale. He went up to dat Auctione'r and said: 'I am lookin' for a coachman and a good man about de grounds.' He says: 'Yes, sir; I has de one you're lookin' for.' 'No,' your Par say; 'I will look 'em over. If I find de one I wants, you can put him on de block.' He see one man he like, and said: 'Put him up.' De niggers in dose days went to de highest bidder, so your Par bid high, and de old nigger was your Par's. Chile, how I goin' to tell you de rest?"

She stopped to wipe her eyes and give her nose a vigorous blow on her apron, thus maneuvering to collect herself.

"Well, Honey, your Par come home wid dat nigger. Before I seed him, your Par say: 'Mammy Sophy, I have bought a good man. I am only sorry it could not have been your old man that I could buy you.' Just den de old nigger come round de house. I took one look, and cried: 'O Lord God be praised! Marster! Marster! Dat's my old man, Edmond, you done brought me!'

"Den old marster took our hands and put dem togedder and said: 'Until death do you part.' I ain't goin' to rack your feelings, Chile, to tell you of de meeting 'twixt me and my old man, but,—God be praised! Thank God, Honey

Chile, it was all before your time dat all de devilishness was goin' on."

"Many am labering under the impreshun dat de Civil War was necessary for the Emancipation of de slaves."

I must admit, in the interest of truth, that such masters as Simon Legree did exist, that a pretty face and form of a yellow girl was her misfortune, and that many a poor creature, like Liza, was the victim of the strong and sinful passion of her master. The wrong, however, has at length been righted, and the suffering of the unfortunates has happily ceased.

CHAPTER I

IN THE NURSERY

"HYAR, you-all, stop dat racket! How you reckon I gwine to git dis chile to sleep wid all dat noise?"

It was in the nursery of an old Southern home. Mammy Sophy, the head nurse, who was rocking little Joe, the baby, to sleep, thus addressed the children and their attendants, admonishing them to be quiet.

"Mammy Sophy," said one of the children, "I want a pin. Give me one, and I won't bother you any more."

"Hyar," she said, as she opened her great black mouth for the little white fingers to hunt for pins under her tongue. It was Mammy Sophy's custom to sleep with her mouth full of pins, and her young mistress knew full well that that unique pincushion would supply the demand.

"Dar, you Rose; how long you gwine to sit dar on de flo' and suckel dat chile? Put him in his bed,—you hyar me?—and go 'tend your work. You' too trifling and no account for ole Miss to feed you."

"Oh, Lord, Mammy Sophy," said Rose. "I'm tired and dis de onliest chance I git to rest. Can't you let me have time to nurse my pore baby?"

"Dar, nigger; you done said 'nough; I don't want any of your sass."

Rose's child George was a week older than the young Master, and Mammy had the little black boy's bed,—which was an old champagne basket,—with a quilt and covering for him brought into the nursery each morning that he might have the same tender care as the children of the household. Mr. Meridith had died a few days before the advent of his little son, who was Mammy Sophy's special charge. Rose had become a serious care to Mrs. Meridith since the death of her good husband; for Rose was cursed with the love for strong drink, and she resorted to every means in her power to satisfy the craving. Already two little lives,—twins born two years before little George,—had been sacrificed to the demon drink.

One morning Mammy Sophy had entered her mistress's bedchamber with the morning coffee.

"Mrs. Meridith," said Mammy, "Rose has not brought in little Moses and Isaac to me this morning. I can't understand it. I was jist going to look for her Misstis, as dat nigger ain't showed up herself dis mornin'." And Mammy Sophy started in quest of Rose.

It was Mrs. Meridith's custom, knowing

Rose's failing, to have the little yellow babies brought into her room each morning, so that she might see that they were washed and dressed and well cared for by their unfortunate mother.

Mammy Sophy failed to find Rose, but the little ones lay cold in death. Mammy Sophy sputtered about, calling down maledictions upon "dat nocount nigger's head,—to leave de babies to freeze." She took up first Moses to warm him, she shook him, gazed into his face, dropped him on the bed, doing the same with the other little one. Terror-stricken she returned to her mistress's room.

"Lord God, old Miss!" she exclaimed. "Dat imp o' Satan done kill her babies. Dey's stone dead, sho 'nough."

"What do you mean, Mammy Sophy?"

"Dat jist what I mean: Dey sho dead. I reckon she come in drunk and lay on dem and smother the breath right outen dem. What we gwine to do wid dat wench?"

Mrs. Meridith found it only too true. Rose had killed her babies in a drunken frenzy, loudly disclaiming all knowledge of the fact.

The customary punishment for so grievous an offense was that the criminal be whipped at the calaboose; but Rose escaped, for Mrs. Meridith would not have this done to any of her slaves.

When Rose again became a mother Mrs.

Meridith felt that it was her duty to take the care of the baby upon herself, and the negro girl was therefore only allowed to nurse it under the watchful eye of Mammy Sophy, who was a sort of feminine major domo of that household. She ruled the servants with a high hand; she loved her mistress to idolatry, nor was Mrs. Meridith indifferent to the faithful soul's gentle solicitude for her comfort, relying upon the black woman in all things.

And this devotion of Mammy's was only one of the beautiful, unselfish examples of the old slaves' love for their mistress and her children.

The Meridiths were large slaveholders; but, with all the negroes they owned, never could a charge of cruelty be laid at their door; for the late master had been a tender, loving husband and father, and the care of the many creatures confided to his keeping was to him a sacred duty.

One of God's noblemen, Mr. Meridith had followed the mandate: "Love one another." Though his slaves were black, ignorant creatures, children of wild fancies, dependent upon those whose property they were, this made him only the more tender toward them in their helplessness. Always willing and ready to stretch out a helping hand to the downtrodden and oppressed, but one instance will be sufficient to shed light on his character,—an instance that

transpired in his library one evening just before his death.

He had been reading aloud to his wife when she suddenly said: "Put down your book, Joe; I want to talk to you."

He looked up, smiling:

"I am all attention. But I thought you were interested in the book," he answered. "Interesting as it is, I cannot banish from my mind poor Mary Wren. I must talk to you about her."

CHAPTER II

MARY WREN

"WHO is Mary Wren, my dear?"

"She is one of the many slaves that have fallen into the hands of cruel masters," was the answer.

"She is a martyr indeed. She belongs to the Wrights, of Seventh street; and as they want to get all they can out of the poor creatures, they send them out each day to find work. The women wash and iron and do cleaning,—in fact, anything they can get to do to earn a dollar for their master. Should the poor creatures fail to get work and return home empty-handed, he takes them out into the woodshed and strips them to the waist, then whips them until the blood follows the lash; after which he puts salt on the wound—just as was done to poor Uncle Tom, you know. Mammy Sophy came to me the other day and said: 'Misstis, Mary Wren is in de kitchen. She bin widout work fer three days and she's feared to go home. De pore critter done stromp de streets, but she can't git no work and her master will whip her when she gits home. She say she ain't gwine home no

mo'. She gwine to end her misery, 'cause she ruther face de Heavenly Father wid dat sin on her soul, 'cause He can understand a pore ole nigger can't stand it fereber, and He knows I can't stand it no mo'.'

"Mammy Sophy asked me, Joe, to see the old creature and try and talk her to reason. I went down in the kitchen. There sat Mary, rocking to and fro, moaning to herself. She is in a most deplorable condition. She showed me her back all cut and bleeding. It was more than I could stand. I asked her if her master would sell her. She answered: 'God knows, Honey. I heered him tell Misstis last night he got to git some money somehow to pay the interest on the home. I don't know what dat means; only dis I knows,—he wants money and he wants it bad. He gwine to sell one ob de niggers if he kin; but, God help me, Mrs. Meridith, it won't be me. Who wants dis pore nigger? I can't do much more nohow now at de best, an' I most dead now. I done got two whippings, an' de odder will be ready for me when I gits home.'

"I said to her, Joe, that I would give her a dollar to save her this night's whipping, and would talk with you and see what could be done for her. My husband, I want you to give that poor nigger a kind master. Buy her for me; I want her, dear."

Mr. Meridith rose, kissed his wife's pleading

lips; then turned and walked back and forth several times before he answered her.

"Do you realize, my dear, what you ask of me? It is one of the hardest things for me to do; to refuse you any request, even if it be unreasonable. Your wish is always my pleasure; but I fear I shall have to refuse this time. I am provoked at Mammy Sophy. She must not annoy you with sad stories of her unfortunate race; she knows, as do all your slaves, your generous, sympathetic heart, and takes advantage of it."

"I grant that all you say is correct, my dear husband; but don't refuse me. I could not have a happy moment after seeing poor Mary."

"You and I look upon our slaves so differently from the way the Wrights and people of their class do. The negro to them is of so much commercial value. It is what a slave can earn, or how much a nigger would bring at a sale. But, to us, dear, they are human beings, with souls the same as ours,—souls as dear to the Heavenly Father as are our own."

"You remember, dear, 'As ye do unto the least of these, ye do unto me.' I know in your heart, dear, you agree with me."

"This Jim Wright you speak of is the one they call 'the slave driver,' is he not?" Mr. Meridith asked.

"Yes," answered his wife, "a cruel, wicked man!"

"Yes," said Mr. Meridith, "I have heard some very hard stories about his cruelty to his slaves. He is a Northern man, I believe."

"I think so," returned his wife.

"If all slaveowners were like him, we could not complain of this present war. It would be justifiable, in my mind, to free the poor blacks."

"No, no, my dear husband; not even the great cruelty of such men as Wright could justify this sacrifice of so many lives! Think what we suffer each day to learn who has fallen! Think of the husbands, fathers, brothers, and sweethearts that are slain on the battle-field and of the dear ones left at home to watch and pray, —the broken hearts that will never know happiness again! I am the last one to wish to keep the poor blacks in slavery. God grant they may soon be free. But think of the bloodshed that might have been saved and the many, many hearts that might have been spared so much sorrow if the Government would buy our slaves and set them free. They are as much our property as is our home. If that should be demanded of us, are we not to receive some equivalent? Or let the Government pay us for our slaves, and we will give them their freedom and stop this cruel war."

Mr. Meridith looked at his wife's flushed face with a kindly smile, and said:

"That is good sound reasoning, my dear.

You had better lay the matter before President Lincoln; he is a very humane and just man, who believes in the rights of all. I am sure he would have it otherwise, if he could; and he would take your proposition favorably, I feel confident. But I am afraid, little woman, it is too late now to interfere. The Yankees are creeping upon us all the time, and none can tell the outcome of this terrible war. Think what it means to us if the North should be victorious,—the loss of our slaves and perhaps all our property. The news from the seat of the war is not encouraging. Would you have me buy that girl, when perhaps in a short time she may be free?"

"Yes, I would ask you, my husband, to do this for me if she were set free the next day. We will trust in our Heavenly Father and do the best we can. He asks no more."

Mr. Meridith kissed his wife good-night, and she left him to think over the advisability of adding Mary Wren to his household. He sat alone far into the night, and when he turned out the lights before retiring, his mind was made up and he reconciled himself to his decision with the thought: "The little wife wants her; that is enough for me." His wife's words had made a deep impression upon him.

The next evening after dinner Mr. Meridith said to his wife:

"If you can dispense with my company this evening, my dear, I will call on a friend."

Mrs. Meridith looked up in surprise.

"Are your friends not mine, Joe?" she asked.

"Yes, dear," was his answer; "but not this one."

And he laughed as he left her.

In a few moments he was wending his way to the Wrights' home. He felt assured that if he should offer Jim Wright a fair price he would part with the woman. However, he reasoned to himself, owing to the unsettled state of the country and the possibility of the freedom of the slaves, it was a very unwise thing to contemplate the purchase of Mary; but to gratify the wish of his wife he felt inclined to disregard his better judgment. So intent was he on this thought that he had passed the house before he realized it.

"By Jove! I'm several numbers away," he muttered, retracing his steps until, by the light of the street lamp, he saw the number "15" on a door. He rang the bell, which was answered by the maid,—a comely yellow girl with such raven hair and flashing black eyes that Mr. Meridith was taken by surprise.

"Yas, sir," she said in answer to the visitor's inquiry as to whether Mr. Wright were at home; "I will take him your kard, sir."

Mr. Meridith looked after the girl, thinking:

"Well, she is a fine-looking girl. All Jim

Wright's negroes are not in such a bad shape as old Mary."

While waiting for Mr. Wright, the caller took a survey of the parlor, and noticed that an oil painting of the owner hung over the mantel. As Mr. Meridith gazed on the face he smiled, and thought:

"I will wager that Wright can drive a good Yankee bargain."

The master of the house had entered quietly, and Mr. Meridith was not aware of his presence until he placed his hand upon the visitor's shoulder, saying:

"You seem very much amused at my portrait,—quite absorbed,—as you evidently did not hear me enter."

"Pardon me, Mr. Wright; I did not hear you enter."

"To what am I indebted for this call, Meridith? You have never been neighborly in the past."

"I regret the omission—the loss has been mine," replied Mr. Meridith, with the suspicion of a sneer, "but as my call is wholly on a matter of business, I will not trespass on your time nor hospitality. You have a slave by the name of Mary; she has done some work for my wife, and Mrs. Meridith has taken a fancy to the woman. Have you a desire to sell her?"

"Sell her!" exclaimed Wright, unable to conceal his surprise and pleasure at the prospect.

"Well, now, Meridith, I don't think I care to sell any of my niggers. Why do you want to buy any more?"

"My wife wants the woman, and I am inclined to gratify her wish, if you care to sell, and we can come to any reasonable terms."

"What in thunder does your wife want with any more niggers? You will have to turn them all loose, as we Yankees are going to lick you Southerners and set the niggers free."

Mr. Meridith, becoming impatient at Wright's coarse manner, replied:

"I did not come here to discuss the outcome of the war. Do you want to sell the woman or not?"

"Can't say I am anxious. I am not pressed for money and did not think of selling any of my niggers, even at what would be called a fair price. So I don't think we can come to any terms, Meridith."

"O dear Lord, hab mercy on me!" came a low wail from the hall.

Wright jumped from his chair.

"Did you hear any one speak, or did I imagine it? My nerves are in a bad shape,—I don't feel myself. This slave question and the outcome of the war has upset me, Yankee though I am. I don't enjoy the prospects of giving up my property. Did you notice that yellow girl who let you in? That is some nigger,—and I would not like to give her up. I am afraid,

Meridith, that when it comes to a good-looking yellow girl, boys will be boys,—born North or South. Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Meridith's disgust was almost beyond his control, and he was tempted to strike Wright down; but he controlled himself as only a Southern gentleman can, and merely looked the contempt he felt.

"Well, well; I am waiting, Wright. Is it a sale or not?"

"Give me time, man. You Southerners are always in such a devil of a hurry. By the way, I don't believe you are a Southerner, are you?"

"No, I am not; but I hope I am a gentleman, as my father was before me. I am English, from Devonshire, but came to this country when quite young."

"Then, by Jove, I don't see that you have anything on us Yankees! We are all more or less of English descent, and I am proud of it."

"I am not here to discuss my origin. I came to ask if you are willing to sell Mary."

"No haste, Meridith. I must have time to think it over."

More groans were heard from the hall. Wright went to the door.

"No one there," he said. The expression on his face was one of fear. "Damned strange how conscience makes cowards of us all!"

Mr. Meridith laughed heartily at Wright's uneasiness, for he had seen poor Mary crouch-

ing down in the shadow of the stairs, listening, to learn, if possible, if Mr. Meridith were going to buy her and take her away from her unhappy home. The thought of the great change from her present surroundings to the Meridiths' home was more than the poor creature could stand, and the exclamation that had alarmed Wright had escaped her before she was aware of it.

"Make me an offer, Meridith. I don't like that nigger; she has always been a heodoo to me."

"I will give you three hundred."

"No; I can't do it. Make it five and she's yours."

"Take three hundred, or keep your hoodoo nigger. I don't want her."

More groans were heard in the doorway. Wright looked annoyed, and his face was ashen.

"I don't need the woman, and three hundred dollars is not such a bad price."

"I wish to buy her, as my wife says, for charity. It is one of her many ways of bestowing charity."

"Damn me, if I know what you mean."

Mr. Meridith ignored the remark, and said:

"I am ready to give you my check for three hundred dollars."

On the table near at hand was a pen and ink. Mr. Meridith drew the inkstand toward him,

and took out his check book. "Come, decide. I do not wish to spend the evening here."

"Three hundred dollars! By George, that would be giving you the woman. But all things considered, you may have her for charity as you term it."

He arose, lighted a cigar, and walked to and fro, until Meridith had finished drawing up the bill of sale and his check for three hundred dollars.

Three hundred dollars given to charity in its true sense! How many, many thousands are given away in the name of sweet charity; yet a few hundred to place a poor, worn-out creature in a comfortable home, or to make the last days of the aged easy, would not be called charity by a person like Wright.

"Mr. Wright, you will please sign this bill of sale. Here is my check. I will take the woman with me."

"What's the great hurry? I will send her to you in the morning."

"I shall wait for her now."

"Oh, well! Excuse me a moment, and I will have my wife call the wench. Make yourself comfortable. Do you smoke?" he asked, handing Meridith a cigar. "You will find matches on the table."

The visitor seated himself and tried to smoke the rank cigar his host had bestowed upon him.

Wright encountered his wife in the hall.

"What does Meridith want?" she inquired.

"He has bought that black wench Mary, and is waiting to take her home to his wife for charity. Ha, ha, ha! These damn fool Southerners beat me. He will have to set her free before long if I don't miss my guess. But there! Don't stand in open-mouthed wonder and gaze at me as if I was *non compos mentis*. You look the fool if ever there was one. Three hundred dollars is not to be picked up every day for a worthless nigger. Go get the girl and bring her into the parlor. I have his check; he gets the girl. Fool and his money are soon parted."

"Mary," called Mrs. Wright, "come here! Mr. Meridith has bought you and is waiting to take you home with him. No, you cannot take any of your clothes. Go as you are. He did not buy your wardrobe."

The dazed negress, who had come to the door, stood looking first at one man then at the other. Wright shoved her toward Mr. Meredith.

"Your new master," he said.

"Mary," said this new master, in his gentle voice, "you are to go with me. In the future you will serve my wife. I hope you will be happy in your new home. Go and bid your fellow-slaves good-night."

Mary did not hear his command, for she had fallen upon her knees at his feet, and was kissing his hands and crying out:

"The Lord be praised! Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"

Mr. Meridith raised her to her feet and led her to the door; then, turning to Wright, he said:

"I wish you good-night." And passing out, he retraced his steps toward home, the poor black woman following him.

Mary was in a very happy state of mind. It was impossible for her to realize so soon her changed condition. Her old back still felt the cut of the lash and her ears still heard the curses of her former master as she walked along in humble submission, repeating in a low voice:

"De Shepherd done found de poor lamb."

On their arrival home, Mr. Meridith said:

"Mammy Sophy, I put Mary in your care. Feed her up and let her rest until she is able to work. Remember, she is to take it easy until she is much stronger."

There was much excitement in the kitchen that night. Mammy Sophy was the first to speak: "Well, nigger; what in de world old Miss gwine to do wid you? You most dead anyhow. Old Jim Wright done cut you fine. Ob all de unreasonableness I ever herd ob, dis is de beatingness.

"Little did I think when I tole old Miss about you dat she warn't gwine gin Marster no peace till he buys you fum dem Wrights. Marster

ain't never gwine git his money's wurf outen you; and dat am sure."

"You right, Mammy Sophy, 'deed you is," said Sally the cook. "I reckon Marster look to me to feed her up. She do look like a picked chicken,—and dat ain't no lie. De buzzards wouldn't git much outen her."

"Mary, whar's your clothes?"

"I ain't got none, Mammy Sophy."

"Look at dem shoes on her feet! Dey ain't fitten for city niggers; only fitten fer de cornfield."

"Dey is all I'se got, Mammy Sophy. Marster Wright gin dem to me; but when I climbs de golden stairs Marster Jesus gwine to gin dis ole nigger golden slippers."

"Hear dat, you-all," said Mammy Sophy with a laugh. "Golden slippers fer dat nigger! Well, howsomever, till den you go to bed an' git your rest."

After all the servants had given vent to their feelings, to their surprise, Mary found voice to speak.

"God knows it warn't fer me to ax Marster Meridith why he buy pore old me. Hit's 'nough fer me to know I'se here. I ain't much use, and my pore old back's most broke; my head done ache to split; but if you gin me a shakedown, Sister Sally, I'll be up an' prime in de morning. Yes; I thank you fer a cup ob coffee—den I'll go an' lay down. I don't feel very pert; dat's

a fact. Good-night, you-all. I'll be up an' well in de morning,—wid de help ob de dear Lord."

While the servants in the kitchen sat in judgment upon the folly of their master's buying Mary, Mr. Meridith sought his wife, who was waiting his return. She was seated at the piano, singing his favorite song: "She Wore a Wreath of Roses the First Time that We Met."

"Yes, dear; the same old sweetheart that wore the wreath of roses." And he kissed her wavy hair. "I have bought you a present, but it is not what I should have selected for you," he laughed, "but it is what you expressed a wish for."

"Where is it? Do let me see it."

"Now isn't that just like a woman?—can't wait. I have not brought it in my pocket, as it happens to be a she."

"Not poor old black Mary!" exclaimed his wife.

"None other; and I had a time with Jim Wright. I do not think I could have made as good a bargain if he had not been afraid of something supernatural. He heard groans while we were trying to come to terms, and I know the old coward was frightened. Mary is your property now. I have given Mammy Sophy her instructions; and no doubt by this time she has Mary tucked away in a nice, com-

fortable bed. You will see her, my dear, in the morning."

Mrs. Meridith was awaiting her morning coffee when Mammy Sophy came in.

"Mistiss, dat nigger Mary powerful bad dis morning. She outen her head. Sally say she toss an' groan all night, but she didn't pay her no mind, 'cause she thought she wer' putting on airs. But dis morning when Sally gits up she say to Mary: 'Well, you feel pert dis morning; and ready to git up and help me to git Marster's breakfast?' But she don't answer Sally; and den Sally see dat Mary is powerful bad, a-ranting an' a-tearing de hair fum her head. What I do, old Miss; what mus' I do?"

"Go and get my coffee, and I will dress and go at once to see her."

Mrs. Meridith found the poor creature very ill indeed. She was delirious, calling upon her former master:

"O Marster Wright, don't whip me any more!" Then she would shout and sing:

" 'Dear Jesus shed his precious blood on de cross fer sinners sich as you.' "

Mrs. Meridith sent at once for the family physician. As soon as he saw Mary he said: "This is a bad case. I do not remember this nigger, Mrs. Meridith."

"No, doctor; she is a new acquisition to my household. Joe bought her for me last night from the Wrights."

"I am afraid it will prove a bad bargain, as she is so used up and has such a complication of troubles that it is almost beyond the power of man to save her for you."

While Mrs. Meridith and the doctor were talking, Mary raised up in bed, singing, "'I see de ribber Jo'dan; O Lord, don't leave me behind! I'm coming, Marster Jesus, I'm coming,'" and fell back on her pillow, exhausted.

"What in thunder possessed Joe to buy that nigger? I wish he had allowed me to look her over before he parted with his money."

Mrs. Meridith explained everything to the doctor.

"Oh, I see," said he, when she had finished. "Well, don't let your sympathies run away with you, my dear madam; it only means one more nigger to give up in a few short days."

The doctor had hardly left when poor Mary's soul had gone to its hard-earned rest.

Wright met Mr. Meridith on the street one day and called out to him:

"I say, Meridith, I hear that charity nigger died. You did not come out very good in that deal, did you? Rather an expensive whim of your wife's, I would call it. You, no doubt, thought it a damned Yankee trick. Well, you will see before long that we Yankees know a thing or two."

And with that parting shot, he drove on. Mr.

Meridith made no reply, but thought to himself:

"I wonder if he will be as much at rest as is poor Mary when he takes his last journey. May he meet old Mary on the Jordan shore where all stand equal,—white and black alike,—in the eyes of the Divine Father."

CHAPTER III

THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Two years have passed since the death of poor old black Mary. Her kind master, Mr. Meridith, soon followed her. Again the children of the household are in the nursery with their respective attendants. Marian, the eldest, with her faithful nurse Becky, who was making doll-clothes for her young mistress's doll; Bell and Jennie, the other little girls, with their nurses, were building houses of cards and blocks; Mammy Sophy was dozing in the great easy-chair, totally oblivious of those around her.

Master Joe and little black George had now grown to be fine healthy boys. They had prevailed upon Rose, George's mother, to come and play horse with them. She, nothing loath, agreed; for Rose would rather play than work. As she would often say: "If dar's anything I do love, 'tis to 'scape work; I never wants to meet it."

She enjoyed the romp with the little boys as much as they did. The play, becoming too noisy, disturbed the slumbers of Mammy Sophy, and she awoke with an angry grunt.

"Stop dis noise! I knowed dat was you, Rose, you lazy nigger! Go, I say, and 'tend to your work. You don't do nuffing but play." And she jerked the lines from Rose's hands and, taking her by the arm, gave her a push toward the door. "Go, I tell you."

But Rose did not go as she was bid; for her eyes fell upon her mistress standing in the doorway.

Mrs. Meridith was deadly pale; and Rose, at sight of her, cried out:

"O Mistiss, what is de matter now?"

Mammy Sophy turned, and, seeing Mrs. Meridith, hastened to her and led her to the easy-chair she had just vacated. The children came running to their mother's side, not knowing what had happened; but in their childish hearts feeling full well that some sorrow had come to their beloved mother. Placing her arms about her little ones, Mrs. Meridith sat as one in a stupor.

Mammy Sophy, gesticulating frantically to the servants, indicated that they were to leave the room; but Mrs. Meridith looked up and said:

"No, no, Mammy Sophy; do not send them away. I have something to say to them,—to all of you."

"Yas, old Miss, dat's all right; but you ain't fitten to talk to dem now, howsomever impor-

tant. Dey can wait. You's sick, honey; you couldn't be no whiter if you was dead."

Mrs. Meridith composed herself with a mighty effort. She took old Mammy Sophy by the hand, and said:

"You have been a good and faithful servant to me. You have served me well, and have cared for my little ones, whom I have intrusted to your loving and tender arms since their birth. You have never failed me in your duty, Mammy Sophy. Do not leave me now in my great affliction."

Mammy Sophy stood as if spellbound. Words failed her.

"Becky," said her mistress, turning to that nurse, "promise me you will never leave your young mistress, Miss Marian,—will always watch over her and be a mother to her. I hope you-all will remain with me while I live. But you are free,—free!"

Tears streamed down the cheeks of the servants; they could not understand their old mistress. Mammy Sophy shook her head and motioned to them that her mistress had lost her mind.

Mrs. Meridith turned to each nurse of the children and asked them to watch over her little ones.

"Coming events cast their shadows before." Mrs. Meridith felt no doubt that she was too frail to stand the strain of the great sorrow that

had come to her in her loneliness, and she clung to her old black slaves for help and comfort.

Rose felt she was especially thanked. Although the least deserving, she was the first to speak. "I tried,—I tried, old Miss, to do right, but de debil would get into me sometimes."

"Hugh!" grunted Mammy Sophy. "De Lord will hab to cast out the seven debils outen you, let alone one; you's possessed, nigger."

"There, Mammy; don't scold her now! I have come to tell you that President Lincoln has signed the Emancipation Proclamation."

"What's dat?" asked Rose.

"It means," said Mrs. Meridith, "that you-all are no longer slaves,—you are free to go and leave me and the home that has sheltered you for so many years. The North has conquered the South. We are ruined. Thank God, your Master did not live to see this day."

Tears glistened on her lashes, and with her arms around her little ones she said: "May God bless and protect you all!" The prayer breathed, she turned slowly and left the room.

Mammy Sophy clasped little Joe in her arms, as if she feared that some harm would come to him. Then she held him up as high as she could, and said to the slaves:

"My Master and yours,—as long as we live, —so help me God! Swear it, you-all,—you hear, swear it!"

Rose sent up a shout.

"You crazy niggers, you-all's free; don't you understand? Lord hab mercy! Can't send me to the calaboose no mo', whatsomever I does. Whoppee! whoppee!" she yelled, dancing around in her glee.

Mammy Sophy, solicitous of the safety of the little ones, grabbed the frantic creature and put her out of the room. Rose went screaming through the house:

"Marster Lincoln, he's de boss! He done sot us free!"

Mammy Sophy turned to her fellow-servants and said:

"Dat nigger done gone 'stracted. I knowed she would cum to no good wid her debilish ways. Look, you-all niggers, I don't know what old Mistiss mean, but I knows dat a clamity is on us,—and old marster in de cold, cold ground! Look, you-all, I saw—" and she held little Joe up for them all to see—"Dis is your master fum now on."

Then, in less dramatic tones, she continued:

"Poor old Miss, her misery is more den she kin bear! De Lord be praised! I gwine to see Edmond. I reckon he kin splain dis to me."

And Mammy Sophy hastened to take counsel of her husband. He, like the famous Uncle Tom, had been a trusted servant of the household, being a special favorite of his Mistress, who took great delight in teaching him to read and write. She had taught him the Bible, in-

structed him in the Gospel, and used to write short sermons for him. Sunday evenings were given up to the servants' worship, the carriage house being used for a meeting-house. The carriages were removed and benches replaced them; lanterns were hung upon the wall, and—the kitchen table, on which were placed a Bible, a pitcher of water, and a bouquet of flowers, served as a pulpit for Uncle Edmond. The servants of the neighborhood were invited each Sabbath evening to attend the services here; and it was a most impressive sight to see those eager faces upturned in listening eagerness to Edmond, as he explained to their uninstructed minds, in his quaint way, the Heavenly Father's love for them.

Mammy Sophy, after leaving the nursery, found her husband in consultation with her Mistress, who was instructing him how to tell his fellow-servants that their emancipation had come at last.

That night all the servants were gathered together in the grand old dining-room, with the family silver shining upon the old mahogany sideboard, and the family portraits looking down from their massive gilded frames. Mrs. Meridith entered, followed by old Edmond. All rose in respectful silence. She attempted to speak but was overcome.

"Tell them, Edmond; I cannot," she murmured.

Mammy Sophy stood close beside her Mistress's chair as the old man addressed his fellow-slaves.

"My dear bruddering an' sisters: Our beloved Mistiss has asked me to tell you, as she is unable to do it herse'f. Our Marster"—pointing to the portrait—"has gone to dat undiscovered land fum whar no traveler eber returns. It was not permitted him to be wid us at dis time, to comfort an' protect our beloved Mistiss in dis terrible hour; his loving arm is not here to hold and support dat frail and tender woman. She now has to look to God above to give her strength.

"You-all hab caused Marster and Mistiss much trouble; dey hab had many, many trials wid you; you hab been to them as their very own chil'en. Some of you were born here, some rescued fum cruel masters, sheltered, clothed, and fed. Those hands"—pointing to his mistress's hands clasped in her lap—"hab soothed your fevered brows when you-all was sick in de bed. She has held your babies in her arms wid so much pride, but dem dear hands are now powerless to help you. Down in your hearts you had better thank de Almighty God and your dear Mistiss for dis good home dat you-all has had, 'cause you-all will never hab another like it when you go fum de shelter of dis home to make homes fer yourselves and chil'en.

"Dis day President Lincoln has made you

men and women free. I hab preached to you-all ebery Sunday to trust in de Lord and wait patiently fer Him in His own good time, and He would break de fetters and set you-all free. Marster Lincoln was in de hands of de Lord, to do His work fer Him.

"The Lord shall be our salvation. He shall be our dwelling-place in all generations. My old wife and I shall neber leave dis home and our dear Mistiss as long as we libe; as long as we hab breff in our old black bodies our place is here, by her side, and here we guine to stay. The rest ob you has to answer fer yourselves. Answer me, who wants to leabe old Mistiss? Who wants to leabe dis old home?"

The slaves replied, all, as if one breath:

"Not me! Not me! We guine to stay right here."

Mrs. Meridith rose.

"I thank you-all for expressing yourselves as you have done to-night; but henceforth I shall employ you and pay you what I can afford for your services. But all is changed now; I cannot do for you as I have done in the past. It is all strange and new to you now; but in time you will realize what freedom means to you. It is for the poor old-aged negroes I grieve. It is sad,—bitter sad,—for them to leave their good homes and to be turned adrift. May God watch over them and you. My prayers will follow you. I can do no more."

Rose, the irrepressible, spoke.

"Ain't you guine to do nuffing fer us? War we guine to git our Sunday clothes? You won't git us a doctor if we sick? Mercy on us, old Miss. What we guine to do?" she queried.

"Rose," said Mrs. Meridith, "you are as free as I am. You may do as you please, and earn your own living."

"How I guine to commence dis freedom? I can't go nowar wid no money. Give me nuff money to go to Boston. Dat's de place a nigger got a show, de Yankees say."

Edmond raised his hand in protest as he saw his Mistress flinch at Rose's words.

Soon Mammy Sophy led her Mistress gently from the room and saw her comfortably settled for the night; then, returning to her fellow-servants, she addressed herself to Rose.

"Rose, Ise 'shamed of you; you sho do need de grace ob de Lord in your heart. You hab caused your dear old Miss many trials, and if you don't mend your ways, Boston ain't neber guine to see you fer de dust you guine to make when dey starts you back. So mend your ways, you wurfless nigger, mend your ways!" Then she sought out her old husband.

"Edmond, you got to splain dis all to me 'fore I sleep to-night. I neber saw de Missus so upset. She drive me fum de room atter I got her to bed, an' I beg so hard to stay. Wid de tears streaming down her cheeks she said:

'Leave me, Mammy Sophy,—leave me with my God. He is all I have now.' I kissed dem poor tear-dimmed eyes, and left her to talk wid de Lord."

"Sit down, Sophy; sit down. 'Tain't in de power of no mortal man to make you understand, let alone your ignorant old husband; but dis I kin tell you: Marster Lincoln done broke de chains, and we am free."

Mammy Sophy was not impressed but indignant.

"Who wants dat-ah freedom dat turns you out in de streets? Not me. I guine to stay right here wid ole Mistiss an' de chil'en."

CHAPTER IV

UNION JACK

Those were hard, bitter days that followed after the evening in the dining-room with the negroes; yet the sun shone as bright upon those heartbroken Southerners as if in benediction from above, and the flowers were as lavish with the fragrance they cast upon the balmy air as if they were not blooming on the grave of the Lost Cause.

One affliction followed fast upon the other. The Meridith household had quieted for the time being. Mrs. Meridith,—with Edmond and his old wife Sophy and Becky, Marian's nurse, were sitting once again in the dining-room. The mistress was telling her faithful servants of her plans for the future. It was a fearful night. Lightning flashed in at the windows, while the heavens roared and clashed with the thunder of that dreadful storm.

"God help any poor nigger out in dis storm to-night!" said Mammy Sophy fervently. "It's a terrible night fer de free niggers dat ain't got no home an' no place to go. Thank de good Lord, ole Miss, we is safe!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Meridith; "it is a terrible

night. May God help and protect my poor slaves,—alas! mine no longer."

Amid the roar of the thunder and the patter of the rain could be heard a wild commotion at the gates,—little children's voices, weeping men, and women crying aloud for help and shelter from the storm.

"Edmond," said Mrs. Meridith, "go and see who calls at our gates, and refuse no one admittance."

Edmond hastened to do his mistress's bidding. He unbarred the gates and threw them wide open. There stood men, women, and children,—more than two hundred wild-eyed creatures. At the opening of the gates, they rushed into the grounds, almost bearing the old man down. The women gathered their little ones in their arms and sought shelter on the galleries of the old home.

"War's Mistiss?" they all cried. "War's she?"

It was the call of some poor, helpless children crying for their truant mother. They were calling for their former mistress, not knowing where else to turn for help in this their hour of need.

Mrs. Meridith was soon among them.

"Poor, poor souls!" she said. "I cannot help you. I am helpless. You no longer belong to me; you are not my property; you must take care of yourselves."

"My God, old Miss! What we gwine to do? We come to you to help us."

Charley Wikerson spoke for his companions. He stood, bare-headed in the storm, and related to his mistress all that had transpired on the old plantation.

"You see it wer' dis way, old Miss: Last night we-all was at de barbecure, when all ob a sudden dar wer' shooting ob de guns and de noise ob de cannons, loud noises ob ebery kind come to our ears. We all looked up. De heabins looked like dey be on fire. De women folkes drapped down on dere knees and cried: 'Lord God hab mercy on us poor niggers. Judgment day done come.' Den we see de soldiers coming near us. 'Is dis Judgment day?' de niggers cried. 'No, you damn fools,' dey laughed, 'dis am Emancipation. You are free. The North has set you all free.' De soldiers pulled de gals about, cuffing dem side de head, and when our men interfered, dey kicked dem down and strompted on dem until dey nearly crushed de life outen dem, and said: 'Take dat! You ain't use to no better.' Sam Johnson jumped on a soldier an' nearly finished him, 'cause he pestered his gal. De officer say: 'Shoot down de black dog!' An' poor Sam drap at my feet, stone-dead. We all rushed up to de house. It warn't there; dey had burnt it down to de ground,—most all de cabins gone, but old Tom Moor's. He stuck his old white

woolly head outen his cabin door. When he see us he say: 'Child'en, my time is cum. I guine to stay right here. De Lord He knows His own. I can't tarry long now. I guine to wait fer my Savior. You-all go up to de city to old Miss; she will tell you what to do.' De Yankees burn up everything, run de cattle off, all but de horses, an' dey keep dem.

"We run down to de riber, steal a coal-barge, an' cum here de bes' way we kin. Nobody bother us,—dey's too many niggers turned loose. Nobody axes us anything. We steal all we kin to feed de child'en, but we most starved ourselfs."

"Yes, God knows," all echoed; "we all most starved. Please gin us poor niggers somethin' to eat, old Miss, please."

The poor little pickaninnies that had never known sorrow,—who had spent their days basking in the sunlight, singing and dancing, and between whiles sneaking through the door of old Mammy's cabin to steal the hoecake and the sweet-potato pone,—stood there, with their eager little hands outstretched to her who had never turned them away empty-handed. They were experiencing now, for the first time in their lives, the awful pangs of hunger. Turned adrift as they were, both old and young were begging of this poor little frail woman, who had always been so tenderly cared for herself, help and protection. To undertake to provide

for so many creatures, without the means to meet the demands, to take care of what was no longer her own, would have been a labor of Hercules.

Thus, what the North fought to save, it had, instead, almost destroyed. For the negroes did not enter upon their freedom with the protection from the North which they had a right to expect,—deprived as they were of their homes and the support and protection of their masters.

It is pathetic to hear an old-time darky tell of the day "Marster Lincoln sot" them free. How they all were to have a piece of land and a mule with which to start their new life of freedom.

"I am sure," said an aged negro, "dat de intentions ob de North was good, but dey didn't hab nuff land nor mules to go round. If I don't libe to git em, my chil'en,—or my grand or great-grandchil'en,—may."

Freedom to the negro was an anticipation of great and better days, as they supposed; but now that the looked-for time had come, like sheep in the darkness and storm, they were helpless, without a shepherd to lead them.

Mrs. Meridith looked upon the pitiable crowd before her in dire perplexity. What was she to do? These creatures must be fed and sheltered from the storm, for the night at least. She recalled the lines of T. W. Faber's poem.

When obstacles and trials seem
Like prison walls to be,
I do the little I can do,
And leave the rest to Thee.

She secured an old Dutch dance hall, and with what bedding she had she made her visitors comfortable for the night. She emptied her own larder and gave them what she had to eat.

In the morning she took several of the men, and with wheelbarrows went from one Government warehouse to another to buy hardtack and green-shoulder,—saltmeat,—for the negroes.

On her return home from her errand of mercy, she was met by Mammy Sophy, who greeted her with the words:

"Honey, don't you worry no more; but I knows dat imp o' Satin guine to make you trouble yet."

"Whom do you mean, Mammy Sophy?"

"Why, nobody but dat outdatious hussy, Rose. But, Mistiss, don't let her pester you. Dat nigger been out all night, and ain't back yit."

Mrs. Meridith smiled.

"You forget, Mammy, that Rose is free to go, and has perhaps found herself another home more to her liking.

"Well, God He knows I hopes she has. Good riddence of bad rubbish, an' I don't care if she nebber cumes back; 'cause she ain't no good

nohow. I hear her tell Sally dat she done heared you say dat you ain't neber gwine to take the oath ob Legance nohow, and dat if you don't, de Yankees can make you a heap ob trouble. An' dat's a fact."

Mrs. Meridith paled, but did not reply.

"Honey, what you reckon dat black imp o' Satin studdin' about? De Yankees cain't hurt you, old Miss."

"Did she take little George with her?" asked Mrs. Meridith.

"No'm; what she want wid dat chile? She ain't gwine to be pestered wid him if she can help it, and she don't care her little finger for de boy; an' I like to see her take him fum de little Marster Joe. Dey out wid Edmond now playing in de garden. Don't you worry, Mistiss."

Becky came in at this moment, saying that a gentleman had come on horseback and wanted to see her mistress. In great haste Mrs. Meridith hurried down to meet him, and found that it was General Devine, an old and dear friend of her husband's. He grasped her hand, with the words:

"I come in all haste to warn you. I fear trouble for you. I saw your nigger Rose coming up the street with two Federal Officers. What does the wench mean? Have you taken the oath of allegiance?"

She shook her head.

"You have not? Then I fear the worst. They are coming with Butler's orders, I am sure, to confiscate your property. Is your silver safe?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You must remember, my friend, that you are well known for all you have done for the Confederacy, the great amount of money you have given for the cause, and all you have done for the boys. You are known as a bitter secessionist, you have dared and defied the North, and I fear for you."

"Do not fear for me, General. Woman has ever been the worst foe that Butler has encountered in the South. Trust this one to be equal to the occasion."

"If I can serve you, dear madam, you have only to command me." And the General gallantly raised his hat, mounted his horse, and rode away.

Mrs. Meridith sent at once for Edmond, and instructed him what to do should the General's fears prove true. She placed old Edmond behind one of the great pillars of the upper gallery, telling him to keep hid until she gave her signal for action. She had the gates locked and barred, then she waited in the parlor for the arrival of the officers. Peeping through the blinds, she saw them approach with the negress Rose between them.

They tried the gates, only to find them locked.

"Jump the fence, and gain admittance into

the house by the door," commanded one of the officers.

Mrs. Meridith stepped out onto the gallery. "What is your pleasure, gentlemen?" she asked quietly.

"We demand admittance at once, madam."

"By whose authority am I thus insulted? How dare you enter my premises?"

"We have an order from General Butler to confiscate your silver and property, as you have not taken the oath of allegiance, and are therefore not entitled to protection."

"May I ask who your informant is, gentlemen?"

"Your own negro, who was a houseservant here, heard you say that you would die before you would take the oath."

"Yes, gentlemen; that is correct. I would die before I would be disloyal to my country."

"Well, madam, we can't stand here and parley all day. In the name of General Butler, I demand that you open that door and allow us to enter."

"And I refuse, in the name of Queen Victoria of England, whose subject I am."

And Mrs. Meridith clapped her hands, and old Edmond unfurled to the breeze the Union Jack of old England. Thus, by the hand of an ex-slave his Mistress's property was saved.

The officers turned, kicked nigger Rose into

the street, raised their hats to the Union Jack and exclaimed:

"Butler euchred by a woman! Madam, we bid you good-morning."

Mr. Meridith was English, and though a slave-owner, he had always remained loyal to the Mother country.

Shortly after this occurrence the household was sadly deranged. Little Joe was called to his home above, to join the father he had never known, and Mrs. Meridith's cup of sorrow was full to overflowing. She, too, soon joined her loved ones in the realms above,—happy to go, for she had done her duty well.

The three little girls,—Marian, Bell, and Jennie,—were placed in the convent at Bay St. Louis, Miss., under the tender care of the gentle Sisters of St. Joseph.

The court appointed as guardian to the little orphans a loyal and trusted friend of the family; but he filled the position of trust only for a short time, when Colonel Tracy was selected to fill the vacancy. The Colonel was a man of no means, but a friend of the family, and as it was necessary to give bond for the estate, the position was rather trying for the guardian. But as Marian was now a young lady of sixteen, and had no knowledge of the outside world, Colonel Tracy conceived the idea that to marry his ward would secure the bond and

place him in the position of trust for his wards, thus satisfying the court.

Marian was, therefore, taken from the shelter of the convent, to become the bride of her guardian. A mere child in years, what did she know about love or the ties of marriage? Her guardian to her was handsome and debonair, and she was the envy of all her schoolmates. It was a marriage of convenience in every sense of the word.

After the marriage Marian was taken to her home in New Orleans, where her own black nurse Becky soon joined her.

Edmond and old Mammy Sophy lived in the home their mistress had given them for their faithful devotion to her and her little ones. The Union Jack, which had done such wonderful service, was given to old Edmond, who valued it as a sacred gift, and would show it to every one with pride, saying:

"Dis here flag, dat old Mistiss called 'Union Jack,' saved her property, an' I was de instrument to let it wave over dem Yankees' head and scared dem away. Poor old Mistiss. God bless her heart!"

CHAPTER V

SIDNEY HARRISON AND MARIAN

The old Southern home,—with its wide galleries all curtained with bamboo curtains,—was gay with bright-colored hammocks that swung from the posts; easy-chairs, placed in shady nooks, that tempted the lover of ease to rest and dream, and everything that bespoke Southern hospitality, love, and welcome for the stranger within its gates.

The walks leading up to the house were paved with pebbles and shaded with large magnolia and orange trees; the flower-beds were laid out in various fanciful designs, while cape jasmine, fragrant verbenas, and roses blossomed and sent up their fragrance to woo the sweet song of the mockingbird.

On the left as one entered the spacious hall were the salons, on the right,—furnished as in the days of the Empire,—the library and dining-room, from the windows of which could be seen the beautifully kept lawn. At the top of the broad stairs that led to the floor above, stood facing any one ascending the door of the young Mistress's boudoir. Within that room, a

massive mahogany four-posted bed, beautifully carved, and draped with lace curtains to conceal the mosquito bar, stood in an alcove. In another part of the room was a beveled, glass-door wardrobe, near the luxurious divan heaped with pillows that exhaled the most delicate perfume. The walls were hung with many choice pictures,—oil paintings and Italian water-colors. Bric-a-brac filled every nook; a Louis XIV clock, in white and gold, stood on the mantel, ticking the hours away.

At the exquisite dressing-table, laden with silver requisites for my lady's toilet, sat my lady herself.

Sad and pensive was the young face reflected there in the mirror, for the girl's heart was not satisfied. Love's young dream had been blighted, the dreamy brown eyes had shed bitter tears, and their possessor had found that the rose-dreams of her heart had many thorns that pricked and caused her to realize the pain of life. But she bore her sorrow in silence, her proud and haughty nature shrinking from baring her bleeding heart to the curious eyes of the world.

A typical daughter of the sunny South,—willowy in form, of olive complexion, with the color coming and going in her cheeks as her feelings were played upon, and with the flash in her dark eyes that betrayed the fire of her emotions; lips of coral, pouting yet inviting; dainty

shell-like ears that were made for music, song, and sweet love whispers,—was Marian Meridith just budding into womanhood.

As she gazed into the mirror, she took a long and critical survey of herself; then, with a sigh, she rose, pushed back her chair, and said in an impatient tone:

"There! I hope I shall meet with his approval to-night."

" 'Deed you will, 'deed you will, my honey," spoke her old nurse Becky, as she entered the room. "O chile, if your poor Mar could hab lived to see you growed up to be such a beautiful young lady, she would have said: 'Becky, you have taken good care of your young Mistiss.' An' 'deed I has. God knows I has tried to do my bes'."

"Yes," replied Marian, "I know, better than any one, what you have done for me. Have you not been a mother to me?—watching over me from my cradle, and showing that no sacrifice, even to giving your life for me, would have been too much for you to render. I am sometimes cross to you, and impatient, I know; but remember, Becky, I love you."

And Marian pressed a kiss upon the black cheek.

"Your dress ain't fasten', chile," Becky remarked irrelevantly, turning her mistress around for fear the girl should see the tears in her old eyes.

She loved Marian as her very own, with the fidelity of a noble and unselfish soul, and she thought Marian was all that was perfect.

"Lor', chile, you turn dis ole head ob mine, and make such a silly ole fool ob me wid your talk, dat I done forgot to tell you dat a young gentleman is waiting to see you in de parlor."

"A young gentleman! Where is his card?"

"He neber gin me no cyard, 'cause he done say most tickular: 'Becky, I want dis to be a surprise for your young mistress. Tell her an old friend, who has jist cumed back to de city after he been away for a long time, and wants bery much to see her.' "

"Becky, I cannot think of seeing him unless he sends up his card. He is very presumptuous in taking it for granted that I would go down to see him without knowing who he is. He is no gentleman, to say the least." Marian felt very indignant.

" 'Deed he is, chile; 'deed he is. Marster Sid is a most perfect gentleman I eber saw."

"What did you say? Is Sidney Harrison in this house,—in the parlor?" Marian grasped Becky's arm, for this was indeed a surprise to her. "After these many, many months why does he come now, when it is too late? Did you tell him, Becky?"

"No, chile; he didn't gib me much time fer to talk; he jist took me by de arm an' say, 'Go, Becky, quick! I am so impatient to see her.' "

While this conversation was going on between mistress and maid Sidney Harrison was pacing the floor of the long parlor in his eager impatience to look upon the face of the only girl he had ever loved.

With the exuberance of youth, manly strength, and vigor, he made a fair picture of glorious manhood as he waited there, his face aglow and smiling, as one who watches the rosy tint on Life's horizon. His hair was of raven hue, his eyes of pansy blue, "twinkling stars," his friends likened them to, his mouth, one that defied dull care and bade sorrow begone. He was known by his chums as "Merry Sid," as his roommate at college, John Barringer, used to say that there was "more beer in the stein and less foam, if Sid was one of the party at supper." Built like an athlete, champion in all college games, and the protection of the weak, he was beloved by all that knew him. Many a designing mamma had set her trap for him; and daughters were instructed to be very gracious to the wealthy young Kentuckian.

Many a sweet-faced débutante had cast loving glances at handsome Sid, and any girl that was lucky enough to get the first dance with Mr. Sid Harrison felt that she was surely going to be a success in the social world. But all the traps of dowagers and the arts of belles failed; he was blind to their blandishments; his sole thought was for Marian.

He was now in the home of his beloved, awaiting her coming. Glancing up in his steady march to and fro, he beheld her coming toward him, with hands outstretched in happy welcome.

Harrison advanced to meet Marian. Grasping her hands in his own, he led her to the sofa, and took his seat beside her, gazing into her face with such love and longing that Marian felt her pulse quicken and her cheeks flush. After feasting his eyes upon her beloved face for a few minutes he broke the silence.

"Marian," he asked, "why didn't you answer my letter? After the ball on that happy night a year ago, I returned to my room at the hotel and found a telegram awaiting me, informing me of the death of my dear father. I left at once for Kentucky to attend the funeral. I wrote and asked your forgiveness for not paying my respects to my lady fair before leaving for my home."

He paused for the girl's answer.

Tears were glistening on her drooping lashes as she said:

"I never received your letter. I thought you had forgotten me, Sid."

How he longed to fold her in his arms!

"So you never received my letters?"

"Not one," she replied.

"Well, I suppose that tyrannical old guardian of yours intercepted my letters, thinking they might turn your pretty head from your

studies; as I understand you returned to the convent at Bay St. Louis soon after the night of the ball. Never mind, dear, we can be happy now, and forget the past. By Jove, Marian, you are a beauty! How the boys teased me when I left: 'Where goest thou, most gallant knight? No doubt he seeks his lady fair.' What a surprise in store for them! Shall you ever forget that night when I, the Knight of Kentucky, in New Orleans, carried off my lady fair and crowned her Queen? I love you, Marian. How could you treat me with such indifference?"

She looked up into his face, trying to smile through the blinding tears, and said:

"Never mind me, Sid. Tell me of yourself."

"I have only one thing to tell you, Marian, and that is, I love you and have come to ask you to be my wife. I could not bear to inquire of any one about you; I was too selfish in my love for you; I could not bear to hear your name from any one else. I tried to comfort myself with the thought that in time you would take pity on me and write to me. With that thought I tried to rest content; but I found that I could wait no longer. Marian, I love you, dear. Marry me, and return with me to Kentucky. I have wealth and position and I will do everything to make you happy. I cannot return without you,—I love you, oh, so dearly, and have loved you ever since that memorable night, one

year ago. I have been patient; I have waited to hear from you; I feared to come until you bid me, but your face, dear, told me its own story when you entered this room. You love me, dear, I know." Harrison clasped the girl in his arms and held her tight. She struggled to be free. He gazed into her face, and its whiteness startled him. "My God," he cried, "are you ill? Forgive me,—I have been too rough with you. I love you so! Be merciful."

Marian murmured hopelessly a few words.

"What's that you say?" Sidney questioned, unbelieving. "Too late? too late? Speak to me, Marian! You rave. Speak. Explain. You are killing me. Let me hold you in my arms; rest your dear head here on my heart, and tell me all."

"No, no, Sidney; you must not touch me," protested Marian. "God help me, and give me courage to tell you all that has happened since I saw you last. Listen, dear; do not interrupt me. My guardian had no money, and he planned a nefarious scheme: I was to be the victim. One night I was brought home from the convent,—which had been my home since my dear Mother's death,—on a pretext, as I was only allowed by special permission to visit New Orleans for the Carnival. Mother Colombe was a mother to me in every sense. She would always greet me on my return to the convent with the question: 'Has my little girl come back to

her convent home heart-whole?' I fear my blushing cheeks told a different story, Sidney, after we had met. Mother Colombe questioned me closely; I told her everything. She blessed me and said: 'My child, may you never know the heartaches I have suffered. You had better stay here with me in the shelter of these dear old convent walls than to go forth into the world and suffer as I have done.'

"But I wander from the subject. As I was saying: I was the victim. My guardian planned to get control of my property, to squander it in riotous living,—to pay his gambling debts.

"He brought me home on Saturday night, and on Tuesday I was made his wife."

"My God!" groaned Sidney.

"Becky, my old nurse, was the only one present. Poor old soul! She wrung her hands in anguish, crying all the time: 'De sacrifice ob de lamb!' The next day I was made to sign papers giving Colonel Tracy control of my entire estate."

Sidney sprang to his feet; he staggered as if he had received a stunning blow.

"He shall answer to me for this. It is infamous,—an outrage!" he cried. Then, commanding himself for Marian's sake, he took a seat beside her. "There is only one way out of this. You love me; you cannot deny it. Such a love as ours is eternal, indestructible.

'Its holy flame forever burneth;
From heaven it came,
To heaven returneth.
Too oft on earth a troubled quest,
At times divine, at times oppressed,
It here is tried
And purified.'

"We are now being tried, and our love is deep and pure. My God! I shall not leave you here another day; law will free you from such a bondage." He extended his arms toward her. "Come," he said; "come with me."

Marian's eyes flashed fire; like a lioness at bay she stood, and faced him with a look he could never forget.

What a battle she fought between love and duty,—alas! duty to what? But honor conquered. She raised her tear-stained face to his, and with blanched lips bid him leave her, as she staggered to a chair.

Sidney realized the sorrow he had caused the girl he loved.

"Forgive me, Marian," he implored; "forgive me for causing you such pain! Let my great love for you plead for your forgiveness. Say that you do not despise me. Think of me as a dear friend. Whenever I can serve you command me. Forget that Sidney Harrison has told you of his love."

He kissed her hand in meek submission. "God bless you, good friend. Good-night."

Oh, how many heartaches could be spared,

how many noble lives could be made happy, if we would only remember that Time, the mighty master, waits for no one. The present is ours to make or mar. Who can tell what will come with the dawn of another day? Life is a wonderful romance. After all, who can say that the Great Dispenser of all Mercy, goodness, and happiness rejoices at our disappointments, sending them as a purification of our grosser nature, to fit us for the supreme happiness that is our heritage.

Suffering softens, indeed, but it saddens, too. The end justifies the means, as it puts us in a better state of mind to enjoy the blessings that the Heavenly Father is waiting to bestow.

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN WATKINS

After Sidney Harrison had left Marian, she returned to her room to tell Becky of the interview that had taken place.

"O Becky, how hard life is!" she cried. "The might-have-beens, the might-have-beens!"

"Yes, chile, I knows, but as old Edmond used to tell us in de good old times: 'We knows not de workin's ob de will ob God.' Who knows, chile, what all dis sufferin' is fer. Some day you guine cum to me an' say: 'Becky, I done fergit how to cry,—I am so happy.' So, Honey, sabe dem pretty eyes fer den."

While Becky was trying to comfort her young mistress, Colonel Tracy, Marian's husband, had come in with his friend Captain Watkins. As the Colonel's home-coming was never looked forward to with any pleasure by Marian, he came and went as he pleased.

Henry, Becky's old husband, was valet, cocktail-maker, and any old thing that Colonel Tracy called upon him to do. Willing old soul, it was for no fondness for the master of the house, but for the love he bore his young mistress that kept him in their service with his old wife.

The Colonel,—or Mr. Tracy, as he was sometimes called,—in his usual mood and temper was calling for old Henry.

"Henry, Henry! Where is that old black dog? Damn it, Captain, I cannot get any of my wants attended to in my own house! By Gad, sir; I will break every bone in his black body when I get him!"

"Hyar I is, Marse Dick. You wants me?"

"Oh; you are there, are you? Well, mix the Captain and me a cocktail. Make six, and leave them there on the sideboard, for if you get away from me again, I will have to screech myself hoarse, you black idiot, before you would come to me."

"Yas, sir; yas, sir; dat's so, sir. But I don't reckon de Captain guine to enjoy dem cocktails arter dey been standing."

"How long do you think those cocktails are going to stand? You make them, and be in a hurry about it. We will take care that they don't spoil from long standing."

"He, he! ha, ha! dat's de God's trufe,—sure nuff," laughed old Henry.

Tracy took up his glass of cocktail.

"Here's to you, Captain."

"Same to you, Colonel."

"Anything mo' you wants, Mars Dick?" asked Henry.

"No; you may go. I'll ring when I want you. The Captain and I have important business to

transact. See that we are not disturbed by any one. Do you hear? Here! Stop a moment. How is your young mistress to-night?"

"She's poorly; an' Becky say dat she, too, don't want to be disturbed by anybody."

And with a chuckle old Henry left the room.

"By Gad, Captain, I have the handsomest wife in New Orleans! She was my ward. I have had the Meridith's estate in my care for several years, after the death of old Major Hanson, who was the former guardian. There were three minors,—my wife and her two sisters, Bell and Jennie. I married my ward Marian, the eldest, and now I am in a devil of a fix. The estate is in a bad shape; I have mortgaged some of the property, but can do nothing more unless I can get Marian's consent. I have succeeded in a measure, and will prevail upon her to sign some papers, as I need money. I have about got things my way, though I made her believe in some way (she never questioned me) that she would lose her fortune, and that I was the only one that could save it; but, in order to do that, she must marry me."

"Does she love you, Colonel?"

"Love? Why, man, what does she know about love? Her young heart has never been awakened to the tender passion. She loves no one but her old nurse, Becky. By Heavens! it makes me sick to see her kiss and fondle that old nigger. Gads! I'd give half my life for one such

moment; but I will make her love me yet, or——"

Having relieved his mind of that subject, he lighted his cigar, and tilting his chair back, said:

"Well, Captain; now to business. How much money do you need to buy the steamer *Dixie?*"

"Colonel," was the answer, "I believe you understand the situation. We,—that is myself and partner,—have no money. You are the only moneyed man in the firm. Captain Scott, Captain McCall, and your humble servant give our experience as expert wreckers. You put up the money. McCall and Scott are old and trusted friends. We can get the contract to raise the *Columbia,* with a large cargo of merchandise aboard, and a consignment of porter and ale to Nunan Brothers, which will not suffer from the immersion in the Red River."

"Say, Captain, I'd like a dozen now," said the Colonel, smacking his lips in anticipation of the pleasure. "Well," he continued, "now as to terms. What did you say the *Dixie* could be bought for? Was it twenty-five thousand?" Before Captain Watkins could answer Henry stuck his head in at the door and said:

"Mars' Dick, dar's a man at de door, an' he got a note, an' he say he must see de Colonel pussonally an' strictly private."

"My soul! What does the fellow want? Show him in."

"He says he don't want to cum in."

"Better see him, Colonel," advised the Captain. "No doubt it is a plea to you for assistance."

"If you will excuse me, Captain, I will see the fellow and dismiss him in short order."

The Colonel stepped out to the back door. There stood a miserable excuse for one of God's creatures.

"Well, my man, what is your business with me?"

Casting a stealthy glance about, to make sure no one was near, the man stepped up and whispered something in the Colonel's ear,—something that made him start and turn pale.

"My God! man; what do you mean?" he ejaculated.

"There's the note. She told me to see that you received it, and I promised to deliver it in your own hands if it cost me my life."

"Here, take this." And the Colonel crushed a dollar into the messenger's hand, and bade him go at once. He hid the note in his pocket and returned to Captain Watkins. He tried to conceal his embarrassment.

"Well, I sent the beggar off about his business. Now then, have the papers drawn up, and I will see you at my office in the morning, at ten o'clock sharp. And, by the bye, how much do you fellows expect to get out of this?"

"Ha, ha! Colonel, you will have your little

joke. I can tell you that I, for one, shall expect an ample share of the profits, in return for my experience as a wrecker."

"Yes; oh, yes; experience comes high," said the Colonel; "but, as gamblers say, 'play high for big stakes.' I must ask you, Captain, to excuse me; for to-night I am not feeling my best. Have a nightcap before you go?"

"I'm with you. Make it straight whiskey. Here's success to the *Dixie!*"

"Good-night, Colonel."

"Good-night, Captain."

Having got rid of his friend, Colonel Tracy locked the door of his library, lighted a cigar, drew his chair up to the fire, and mused:

"I wonder what she can want of me. She fully understands that we can never be anything more to each other. We parted friends, and she wished me every happiness when I told her that I was to be married to my ward. Gad! A man's past will never down. It rises up to slap him in the face, just when he wants to forget it."

A reckoning is sure to come. When it comes who shall say in what way and, by God's will, how swift.

"I hope in time to make my wife love me," his thought went on; "but would she, if she knew of this affair? I think young girls ought to be told that life is not all *couleur de rose;*

that men will have their fling. Better to sow wild oats sooner than later in life! A man's past is his own; his present belongs to his wife, his future to his God. Women expect too much of men. They want a man to bring to them a clean white sheet for them to write their husband's life upon. We expect a great deal of our wives, it is true, and the bigger sinner a man has been, the more saint he wishes his wife to be. When he becomes satiated with life's follies, and makes up his mind to marry and settle down, he demands the best and purest of women to bear his name,—the name he himself did not honor."

With a savage oath, Tracy tore the envelope open, drew out the letter, and read the following words:

COLONEL DICK TRACY.
My Dear Friend:

I crave your pardon for addressing you again after our understanding a few short months ago,—happy months to you, no doubt, but, God help me! how horrible to me. Night after night I have prayed for strength to bear the pain and heartache,—that such as I may dare to seek the throne of God, with your dear name upon my lips, for He has said: "Though we fall seventy times seven in one day, He will be merciful and forgive."

I have followed your girl-wife and her old nurse, to see if I could hear your name from her lips, or some tender confidences concerning you,—something that might reconcile me to giving you to her. But oh, my beloved, she does not care for you; to her you are still the exacting guardian of old. She does not know the meaning of the word "love,"—your chit of a schoolgirl wife. I would not rob her of one moment of your time, but do let me see you once more. Let me, who adores you, look upon your face and hear your voice again.

Can you forget, Dick, the happy hours we have spent together? Grant,—oh, grant me the cravings of my heart's desire just once more, I beg.

Your loving and heartbroken

ESTELLE.

Folding the letter and replacing it in the envelope, he returned it to his pocket.

"Hang the woman! What does she mean? She wants to torment me with the thought that my wife does not love me. It is a woman's sweet revenge. She will never let the man that once loved her believe that another woman could ever love him half as well as she has done. That thought does not tend to feed a man's vanity, by Jove, and she hopes in time to have me once more her willing slave. That can never be. Curse her! Why will she not let me alone? We have had some happy hours together, and it was for the love of me that she gave up home, family, and all that was dear to her. God! But a man can sometimes play the knave! Try, though, as I may to undo the past and to live better, the old habits of a lifetime assail and mock me.

"There is nothing about me to win the love of a woman like Marian. Dog as I am, I know it only too well. If she would only show me some affection, I would try and repay her.

"It is a sad position for a man to be in,—to be treated like a stranger in his own home,—not mine by rights, I know full well. It is Marian's roof that shelters me, Marian's

money I control, and I am hated by her, I know. A fellow will have queer thoughts sometimes.

"Poor Estelle! Dear girl, how she must miss me, after all. I must not be too hard on her for her great love for me. Heighoh! such is life. I guess I will take another drink, and go to bed."

But the Colonel lighted a cigar instead, and sat and dreamed until the wee sma' hours, before he sought his chamber.

Man's very existence demonstrates how vain are all his calculations and desires, and how, like withered leaves, they are carried away and tossed about by the breath of Destiny.

Sleep did not visit Colonel Tracy that night. He lived over the past, trying to reason with himself. What is life? Men at heart are all polygamists. He tried to argue with himself that every man's destiny is foreordained. What an odd thing human nature is! It always finds excuses for what it wants to do, and condemns the same act in others. Evil is the god we do not understand. Only by our passions do we awaken to the fact that right is right.

What a weary night it was! As the dawn was peeping through the window Tracy moved over to it and watched the sun rise.

"A good omen!" he laughed. "I cannot remember seeing the sun rise for many a month. How beautiful is the golden glare! I shall try to make amends for the past."

However, the decision he had reached was

not one that portended a better life, for he had reached the conclusion that he would see Estelle once more and bring her to reason. Rather a dangerous experiment for him, all things considered.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROBBERY

"WHO dat banging at de door? Who dar?"

Sally, the cook, opened the door. "Dat you, you no-account nigger? What fer you don't ring de bell? De bell's on de gate; didn't you see it?"

"Well, Sally, de gate was open an' I jist walked in."

"Well, now you's in, what you-all want? You don't need to sniff at dat tater pone an' dat coffee steaming on de stove, case I don't feed no tramp niggers."

"Ise got as good a home as you got,—at Mis' Baynard's, an' Ise jist as free as you is, an' I ain't no tramp, an' you don't need to put on no airs wid me."

Sally sniffed and threw back her head in disgust, as she said:

"Mars Baynard's clothes don't fit you, I reckon, seeing's you don't w'ar his castoffs, an' yo' head's too big fer his hat, too."

"Dat ain't none ob your business, an' I ain't hyar to talk wid you nohow."

Sally turned to her cooking and ignored Jim,

who sat patiently awaiting the return of her good nature.

Sally was known far and near for her excellent cooking, and had it been her fate to have been born in Paris, she surely would have been classed as a *cordon bleu*. When her mistress announced that there was to be company for dinner Sally was very particular, and would allow no one to interfere with her menu. Her assistant little Ophelia, who scoured the knives, pots, and pans, was in mortal terror of a "cuff side de ear," for being "under foot." What did she know,—poor little coast nigger!—about style? She was but a child of six at that time.

"War's Becky?" asked Jim.

"Lor'! you done woke up, nigger? I disremembered dat you was sittin' dar."

Becky came into the kitchen just then, and Jim went toward her and handed her a note, saying: "Miss Baynard tole me to gin you dis note for Miss Marian, an' wait fer a answer."

"Miss Marian done got company," replied Becky, "an' I can't disturb her, but you kin tell Mis' Addie dat Becky say dat it's all right, —she 'tend to it."

"Howsomever, I guine to wait fer de answer," persisted Jim.

"Yas, an' wait fer me to axe you to draw your chair up and eat, I s'pose? Well, you kin wait, case I ain't guine to do nuffing ob de kind."

"Sally," said Becky, "please gin Jim a cup ob your good coffee, while I goes to see if I kin gin dis here note to Mis' Marian."

Sally filled a big bowl with steaming coffee and set it on the table. "Dar! I don't 'vite you,—remember dat,—but you kin pass your 'pinion to me 'bout dat coffee when you is finished."

While Jim is enjoying Sally's good old French coffee and cake, there will be time to describe the friendship between Marian and Mrs. Baynard,—a friendship that dates from their earliest childhood. Their mothers had always been the best of friends, and the little members of the two families were brought up together. They were taught to share one another's toys; and as they grew older their friendship strengthened, and it lasted throughout life. From girlhood to womanhood Marian and Addie Baynard had shared each other's joys and sorrows. Their old black nurses held many a girlish secret for their young mistresses, which no other knew.

Mrs. Baynard had married the man of her choice. It was an ideal match; her husband was a great, big, whole-souled man, who looked upon his wife as just the sweetest little woman in the world.

Mrs. Baynard, who was in the habit of calling her six-foot husband "Preserves," would laugh-

ingly say to Marian: "No one would think I mean 'sweetness' when I address Will."

Becky went to the parlor to deliver Mrs. Baynard's note. She disliked to disturb her young mistress when she had company, so she knocked gently at first; after a few seconds' silence she knocked again. Receiving no answer, she listened. Everything was quiet.

"Hum!" mused Becky; "dey mus' be bery interested not to hear me. I can't keep ole Jim in de kitchen all night. I guess I'll go in. It ain't polite tho'."

Opening the door gently, her first impression was that the parlor was empty, but entering, she discovered her young mistress with her face buried in the sofa-pillows, crying as if her heart would break.

Becky clasped Marian in her arms and said:

"What's de matter, honey?—what's de matter wid my poor chile? My sweet lam', who hurt you, honey?"

Marian choked back her sobs, and looking into the anxious, loving old face, smiled and said:

"There, you old silly, I'm all right! I was just thinking."

"Thinking, chile! Tell Mammy; fer she could always kiss de hurt spots an' make 'em well when you was a little gal. Mammy loves you. Let her help you now."

"You dear faithful old soul! Nothing is the

matter; but, oh, Mammy, I am so unhappy!"

"Yas, I knows, poor chile. Marse Sid griebed you."

"No, oh, no! I was thinking what might have been, Becky. I wonder if all will be white in the next world. I should think only the pure of heart should be white and the sinful ought to be black. Your old face is black, but your dear old soul is whiter than snow."

"De good Lord knows bes'; but if I had my way, I would make a certain gentleman we bof' knows black an' blue fum head to foot fer making my pore chile so unhappy. But, Lor', chile, I done fergit why I come; I fergits eberthing when I see you crying. I went in de kitchen jist now, an' Sally an' Jim was 'sputing 'bout eating. Sally 'low she ain't guine to feed no tramp nigger, an'——"

"Never mind about that, Becky. What did Jim want?"

"Dar, I done fergit de most tickler thing, on account ob de misery in my head. Jim gin me dis note fer you fum Miss Addie."

And Becky handed the note to her mistress, who read:

DEAR MARIAN:

I am so lonesome for you, I feel I cannot survive another day without you. I would love to have you come and lunch with me to-morrow, but Mamma is going to have some of the sisters of the church (committee women of doubtful age and sour visage) call on her to-morrow. I felt that you would not enjoy their company, so I shall invite myself to lunch with you instead. I want you all to myself.

No danger of your old "Watch dog" being at home, is there? Until we meet, remember

Yours lovingly,

ADDIE.

"You may tell Jim to say that I shall expect Mrs. Baynard to-morrow."

Becky returned to the kitchen and found Jim and Sally had adjusted their difficulties and were now on very best of terms with each other. She delivered the message; Jim rose to go, and after nodding good-night to Becky turned and said:

"Sister Sally, I hopes you will do me de great honor to 'scort you to church nex' Sunday; you needn't be spu'ious, case I ain't guine in dese clothes. Marse Baynard done gin me a new suit, an' I wants you to do me de honor ob my furst uppeariences in dem wid you."

"Well, I reckon I kin scare up nuff Christian spirit to go wid you."

"Now you is talking, Sister Sally," said Jim, as he left in high glee; for he had always had a high regard for Sally and her cooking.

Marian had returned to her room, and was being made ready for bed by Becky, who, after disrobing her mistress, put on her wrapper and was combing and brushing her luxuriant hair. Suddenly they were startled by a loud voice calling out impatiently:

"Marian, Marian; where are you? I want to talk (hic) with you, do you hear? Sleep,—hey? always (hic) sleep."

"O Becky, what shall I do,—what shall I do? Don't let him in here. He is drunk again," said Marian, trembling with fear.

"Shee! Don't you do nuffing. 'Member you is sound to sleep. I'll take him to his room, an' call Henry."

And Becky closed the door and faced Colonel Tracy.

"Marse Dick, Miss Marian been quite sick dis ebening, an' now she gone to sleep dis three hours."

"Sick, by Gad! always sick. I'm tired of this nonsense,—you hear, you old devil?"

"Yas, Marse Dick, I hyars you; but de debil guine to git you some day, too. Come to your room; youse tired. I'll call Henry."

"Yes (hic, hic); I'm damn tired. Call Henry to pull off these boots."

When Henry came, Colonel Tracy insisted on going downstairs and having another drink.

"Go to bed, you black fool! I am going to stay here," he decided when he reached the lower floor.

And Henry, nothing loath, left the Colonel in the great dark parlor, and went to bed.

Becky sat beside her young mistress's bed, since all sleep had fled from Marian's eyes.

"Honey, Henry tole me dat de Colonel had a lot ob money on him dis ebening. You ought to go, when he gits to sleep, an' take it outen

his pockets, like mos' wives do when dey husband cum home drunk."

"Oh, no; Becky, I could never do that. I should feel like a thief."

"Why, chile; it's your money. De Colonel got plenty, and if you don't take it, he will spend it all in drink to-morrow."

"Well, I cannot. So don't talk to me so, Becky."

It was near morning. The first peep of dawn was creeping in through the parlor shutters when Colonel Tracy awoke from his drunken slumbers.

"Henry, Henry!" he bawled in excited tones. "Henry, where are you? I've been robbed,—yes, robbed! Every damned cent gone! and, by Jove, my watch and chain, too!"

The household was all soon astir, and hurrying to the parlor, they found the Colonel purple with rage.

"You dog!" he shrieked, as Henry came into the parlor. "Why didn't you put me to bed last night,—and not leave me here alone? Not a word, not a word, you black fool. Get me some strong coffee at once. Has my wife been informed of this? Ha, ha! Nice joke on me! Won't the boys have a laugh at my expense?"

The shutters had been wrenched apart, and though every effort was made to discover the

thief, it was of no avail. He had come and gone, and had left no trace.

"Dar now, dar now, Honey; you was too honest to he'p you'self to your own money last night! Now, what you think? Wish you had now, don't you? Well, it's too late now; somebody got it w'at guine to keep it sure nuff I'm here to tell you. Three hundred dollars! Dat seems a heap o' money. Dat's what your poor Pa gin Old Jim Wright fer Mary Wren dat died de next day. Well, you can't buy niggers, now, dat's a fact. But de Colonel guine to miss it to treat his fr'en's, I'm a-thinking. He, he!"

And she laughed quietly to herself.

When Becky saw Henry she said:

"How come you lef' Marse Dick in de parlor? Why didn't you put him to bed?"

"He won't go, Becky," was Henry's answer. "He dribe me out. It's all feather-bed to a drunken man; so I lef' him on de floor. But who you reckon got dat money, Becky?"

"Well, I dunno; but I guine to inform you dat dat one who did git it is guine to keep it, an' dat ain't no lie," laughed old Becky. "What you reckon Mammy Sophy guine say when she knows it. She guine to fillerbluster around here and axe why nobody ain't thought ob Miss Marian, and took dat money fer her. She guine to rave an' tare, an' say: 'Becky, how cum you didn't git dat money fer Miss Marian? How

cum you didn't think o' dat?' Well, 'tain't no use to talk now,—de money's gone, an' it ain't cuming back nuther. But jist let Marse Dick cum home ag'in with money in his pockets,—an' drunk,—an' I tell you-all I ain't guine to answer for my fergiveness an' where de money gone to."

"Take care, nigger, you ain't heading fer jail."

"Heading fer nothing! If you-all can't take care ob Miss Marian, I guine to do it myself. 'Tain't no sin to steal fer Miss Marian what belongs to her same as our own."

"You know, Becky, you promised old Miss to take care ob de young Miss, an' you better do it, too."

"Go on away fum hyar! Don't cum pestering me, Henry. You leabe it to me to take care ob Miss Marian. I kin jist feel it in my bones,—what Mammy Sophy guine to say 'bout dis robbery. Miss Marian say: 'Don't tell Mammy Sophy, Becky'; an' I ain't. I guine to leabe dat to Sally. You know she ain't got no padlock on her mouf; an' if she eber did, she don' lost de key so's she can't lock it. So Ise guine to leabe it to her to splain it to Mammy Sophy. Lord a-massy! here she cums now, puffing up de stairs."

"Whar's Miss Marian? I had a powerful bad dream 'bout her las' night, an' I cum over here to see what's de matter wid dat chile."

"O Mammy Sophy, cum right in."

"Yes, chile, Ise cuming. I hopes Judgment day don't trabble no faster dan dese feet ob mine do, case it guine to coch me sure, if it do."

"Well, Honey Bird, how's you feeling dis morning?" was her greeting to Marian.

"Mammy Sophy, did they tell you about the robbery?"

"No, chile. What robbery?"

Marian proceeded to tell her.

"How cum Henry, or Becky, or some ob dese no-'count niggers, didn't put him to bed?"

"He would not go, Mammy Sophy."

Just then Becky came in with a tray of refreshments for Miss Marian. Mammy Sophy turned on Becky:

"I don't see dat your sleep las' night was bery refreshin'—you look mighty heavy-eyed; you mought as well sot up an' watched de boss fer Miss Marian, so's he wasn't robbered. Dis house is sure guine to destruction. I'll hab to cum hyar an' take care ob Miss Marian."

Becky's ire arose at these words.

"You wait, Mammy Sophy. What goes ober de debil's back cums under his belly."

"Well, dat ain't saying who guine to help de debil," was the retort.

But Becky was too angry to reply.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHURCH FESTIVAL

"Becky, did you tell Sally that I am expecting Mrs. Baynard to lunch to-day?"

"Yas, ma'm, Honey; an' she's outdoing herself, case she say dat Mrs. Baynard's cook done gin her many a sinful thought in de church, case Mahaly always axin her when she see her, in a 'ceitful way: 'How you makes Liberty pie, Sister Sally?' she do dat so snearin', 'cause we-all stay wid ole Miss arter Marse Lincoln sot us free. We staid wid dear ole Missus till de heabenly Father done called her home to her reward, an', chile, she is a angel in de heabens, if eber dey was one. You was too little to onderstand, but some day I guine to tell you all about it. Dat Mahaly thinks dat shiftin' erbout fum one place to another is more inderpendent, an' she flaunt her freedom all de time. I tole her one day dat I reckon her white folks was glad to git shed of her. We will neber leabe you, chile, no matter what happens."

Suddenly Becky's whole manner changed.

"Go away fum hyar,—go away, I say. How dar' you cum before Miss Marian in your bare

feets, an' your nappy wool all wrapped wid shoestrings? You is a nice picture fer her eyes to rest on."

"There, there, Becky; let the child come in. I have seen very little of her since she came here from the coast. Come here to me, Ophelia. Where are your shoes?"

"I ain't got no nice ones, an' de ones I done had when I cum fum de coast, wid de pegs in, Aunt Sally say dey sturbs her narves, an' dat I tromp so cross de floor ob de kitchen, like a troop o' horses, dat de cake in de oven can't rise."

"Well, Ophelia, if you are a very good child, I will have Becky take you to town some day, and get you a nice dress, a hat, and a pair of shoes,—and some ribbon for your hair, too."

"Please, Miss Marian, I likes yaller ribbon for my hair, case Aunt Sally say, 'Yaller to yaller makes yaller look white.' "

"Do you want to look white, Ophelia?"

"Yas, ma'm; case Ise born free."

"Well, well; what you cum up here fer?" said Becky.

Ophelia clapped her hands to her head, as if expecting a cuffing for neglecting her errand.

"Please, Miss Marian, Aunt Sally say does you want to send her any orders for de lunch?"

"No, I think not, Ophelia. Becky will go down and see that the table is well set, and everything in order."

"Yassum."

And Ophelia started downstairs, singing at the top of her voice one of Sally's favorite hymns:

> You may go dis way, an' go dat way,
> And beg fum door to door,
> If you ain't got de grace ob de Lord in your heart,
> De debble guine git you sure.

A knock was heard on the door and Mrs. Baynard entered.

"Well, old girl, you see I take the liberty of an old friend and come right up; how are you, Marian dear?" she asked, kissing her friend affectionately and throwing her hat and sunshade on the bed. Seating herself in an easy-chair and preparing to make herself very comfortable, she exclaimed, "O Marian, I have some news for you. Whom do you suppose I met on my way here?"

"Can't guess, Addie. As you know, we both are as bad at guessing as we were at arithmetic at school," replied Marian. "How often our poor teacher used to say: 'If you two girls ever learn a rule in arithmetic, I fear you would have brain fever from the exertion.' Will you ever forget the time we did learn the largest rule and were sent to the head of the class,—I first and you next,—and also how we were sent to the end of the class after that lesson, and you told the teacher that you did not feel at home

anywhere else? I don't remember our ever exerting ourselves after that, do you?"

"I can't say that I do, Marian," laughed her friend. "Well; I suppose I will have to tell you whom I met: Sidney Harrison!"

And Addie Baynard looked from beneath her long, drooping lashes to see how Marian would take the announcement. But her companion betrayed no surprise, and Addie said to herself:

"Well, she is cute, I must say! She has her feelings well under control. I don't believe she is as indifferent as she would have me believe." Then, speaking aloud, she said:

"O Marian, he has grown so handsome,—not but what I always thought Sidney Harrison good looking,—but he is the handsomest man I ever saw excepting, of course, my dear old Will, whom I am more and more in love with than ever. But it is quite old-fashioned to be in love with one's own husband, isn't it, Marian?"

"Oh, spare me!" cried Marian; "I am not equal to hearing Will Baynard's good points this morning. What did Mr. Harrison have to say?"

"I told him," said Addie, "that I was on my way here, and how jolly it would be to have him come with me, and we could all lunch together. I told him how delighted you would be to see him, and what a surprise it would be to

see us walk in together. I said: 'O Mr. Harrison, it will be such a jolly lark. Do come!' I wondered at the time why he did not jump at the proposition. Looking up into his face, I saw he was deathly pale. His mouth twitched fearfully. He looked as though he would fall. In my impetuosity, I exclaimed: 'O Mr. Harrison, you surely are not subject to fits?' 'No, no!' he replied; 'but I have seen Marian,—God bless her! I know all.' He grasped my hand, adding: 'You can be my friend as well as hers. I can never, never see her again. It would be disastrous to both. Here is my address. Promise me, if the day ever comes when she should need a friend,—which I fear she will soon,—will you send for me?' And with a fierce handshake he was gone. I don't believe I shall be able to use my poor hand for weeks. Marian, you have seen him, and you have suffered,—you cannot deny it. Sidney loves you desperately. I wish it might have been Sidney."

Marian answered, with seeming indifference:

"We cannot order our lives, dear friend. One's environment may be very unpleasant. Constant heart-aches, mortifications, humiliations, tears, angry rebellion at our lot in life, do not avail us anything. Addie, dear, have you ever thought that we must suffer to be strong? God is never absent-minded. He has put me here, and He will not forget me. In His own good time, I shall know why I must

suffer. But enough of this. I want a happy day with you, dear, and will not mar it with vain regrets. I shall always think kindly of Sidney Harrison. But it was not to be. He will get over it in time, no doubt. Come, let's go to luncheon. I heard the gong."

Sally had surely outdone herself in the preparation of the luncheon. All the dainty dishes her fertile brain could conceive had been placed before Mrs. Baynard to show her "she had no kine uv a cook in dat Mahaly o' hern." She had told Ophelia to repeat to her any remarks she might overhear, on the penalty of "not gittin' one moufful o' lunch herse'f."

Addie remarked to Marian:

"I should like to steal your cook. My Mahaly is getting very unruly, and annoys me exceedingly. There is no dependence to be placed in her. I am in hopes, if she ever gets religion, she will improve in disposition,—and cooking." She wound up with a laugh.

Becky entered at that moment, and said:

"Scuse me, Miss Addie. I hear you talkin' 'bout Mahaly gittin' 'ligion. Don't you an' Miss Marian want to go wid me to-night to de church festibal? I reckon dar will be some git 'ligion dere. Lots o' white folks will be dere, an' Brudder Walker gwine preside."

"Do let's go, Marian. I think it would be great fun. I will send Mamma a note to tell Will I shan't be home until late. Becky can see

me home from here afterward. Oh, do let's go. It will do you good, Marian. I would go anywhere to see you laugh, as you did in the old days."

"What a tease you are, Addie!" smiled Marian. "I'll go, just to stop your begging."

After dinner the girls started with Becky for the festival. As they entered the church the colored brothers and sisters were singing with great fervor:

> Lower dem chariot wheels, O Lord,—
> Lower dem chariot wheels
> And let de righteous in!

Becky made a sign to the minister, Brother Walker,—who was walking about among his flock,—to come over to their pew. He did so, and she introduced her young mistress and Mrs. Baynard. Brother Walker bowed low.

"Ladies," he said, "I is highly honored to see yo' benightened countenance at de festibal. I hopes you will do me de great honor of partakin' ob de 'freshments, and would solicit yo' assistunce in de cuttin' of de cake."

Becky answered for all her party: "I will fotch de ladies to de 'freshment table after de sarvices."

Brother Walker then addressed his people thus:

"My dearly beloved Bruddern an' Sistern. I hopes you all will join wid me in song an' prayer, to praise our Heavenly King."

Sighs and groans came from the mourners' bench, on which were seated several old mammies, with white head-handkerchiefs, which had replaced the gay bandannas of every-day wear. It was their particular mission to call upon sinners to repent. They rocked and moaned, calling out: "Sister dis, an' Brodder dat, ain't you felt de Lord in yo' soul?" while they sang:

I see Sister Mary,
I see Sister Mary,
A-rockin' an' a-rollin' in-er Jesus' arms.
He's a-waitin' fo' yo' all to come.

At all this Mrs. Baynard giggled. Several of the congregation turned and frowned upon her. One old deacon came to her, and in a very dignified way said:

"Lady, if you can't compose yo'sef, I'll be 'blidged to 'vite you out, as you 'stract de meetin'."

Becky resented this remark.

"You go 'tend yo' stray lam's. My ladies kin take care uf demsefs. If dey wanta laugh, it's none o' yo' bizness."

Looking up, they caught sight of one of the sinners, who was in a religious frenzy,—jumping up and down and throwing her arms about in wild excitement.

The mourners shouted in thanksgiving:

"Bless de Lord! She's got 'ligion. Bruddern an' sistern, pray,—pray, an' thank de

Lord. De vilest sinner can return to de fold. Hallelujah! hallelujah!"

At the words the poor creature screeched, yelled, and beat herself about the head in fearful fury.

"Hold me, sister! Hold me, brudder! Let me shout! De Lord done enter my soul."

Suddenly Addie seized Marian by the arm, saying excitedly:

"Look, look, Marian! That is my Mahaly, and your Sally is holding her." Sally had grabbed Mahaly under the arms from the back, and kept crying:

"Shout on, shout on, my sister! You is free from sin,—washed in de blood ob de Lam'. Hum! hum! Bless de Lord! Shout, sister."

And Mahaly, feeling herself in a strong embrace, gave up to her frenzy. She tore her hat from her head, and jumped and sang.

When this performance was at its height, Sally, with all her strength, slammed her convert down in the pew, where she lay exhausted. Not waiting for refreshments, Sally hurried away, being overheard to say on her way:

"Dat nigger did me dirt, an' Ise done knocked de 'ligion cl'ar outer her. I reckon I done broke every bone in her black body."

Mrs. Baynard felt sure her Mahaly was done for and that she would be minus a cook. She had Mahaly taken home, rubbed well with oil, and put to bed. But even after this treatment

she was very lame in the morning, though quite content, for she had saved her soul from the devil. She knew that Sally had held her and dropped her down; but, as she expressed it to Mrs. Baynard:

"Dat was de price ob sin. An' now I is one ob de choosen few. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

Marian and her friend were very much amused by their evening's entertainment, which had the effect of restoring for a time Marian's old bright spirits. As Becky told Sally the next day:

"I don't keer if yo' gin me ebery nigger to hold dat gits 'ligion I would do it jist ter see Mis' Marian laff like she done at de festible."

CHAPTER IX

MADAME ESTELLE

After the ladies, accompanied by Becky, had gone to the church festival, Colonel Tracy returned home and was met at the door by Henry.

"Where is my wife?" he demanded.

"She's out, sir."

"Out where?"

"Mis' Marian, Mis' Baynard, an' Becky all gone to de church festible, sir."

"What church festival, you damn fool?"

"Brudder Walker's church, sir. Dey gwine ter hab a fine time to-night, an' Becky thought it would 'muse de young ladies; so she took 'em."

"Well, I shan't stay in this empty house alone; the very walls seem to mock me; the pictures on the wall seem to grin with glee as I look at them. I am nervous and not myself to-night. I shall seek more congenial company. Go, get my hat. Here; wait a moment. Bring me a decanter of whiskey off the sideboard."

"Yassir, yassir. Any water, sir?"

"No, no!" And pouring out a large drink,

the Colonel drank it down at one gulp, walked out of the house, slammed the door, hailed a passing cab, jumped in, gave the driver directions where to go, lighted a cigar, leaned back in the cab out of sight, and said to himself:

"Well, I suppose I am a fool to see her again. But perhaps I had better see her and settle it once and for all. It can do no harm, and she may be in distress. That would never do. I mean no disloyalty to my wife. On the contrary, it is best that Estelle should be made to understand that it must not happen again."

"Here you are, sir," the cabman announced as he drew up before a house on Bienville street.

The Colonel, with a flushed face and many misgivings as to his conduct, entered the courtyard of this house, in the old French quarter of New Orleans. Mounting the dark stairway to the second floor, he raised the quaint old brass knocker on the door at the end of the hall and knocked gently. The door was opened by a bright-faced mulatto girl, who exclaimed: "Marse Dick, dis surely ain't you. I feared it was yo' gost."

"No, Virginia. I am worth lots of dead men yet."

"Dis gwine ter finish Miss Estelle, when she see yo', 'case she's most dead now grievin' fo' yer." Estelle had overheard the conversation, and as Tracy entered the parlor of her little

home she rushed into his arms with the happy exclamation:

"Joy never kills. O my love, I live again! Forgive me, Dick; for I have suffered so much. You would not deny me this comfort,—to feel the embrace of your dear arms. Hold me close to your heart once more, my love."

The Colonel tried to free himself from the woman's embrace, saying: "Estelle, listen to me; be reasonable. This must not be. I came to-night in answer to your note, it is true, but not to your plea. I feared you might be in need. If I can assist you as a friend or brother, I will be glad to do so, but, remember, I shall be true to my wife."

"I have sinned," said Estelle; "but I have suffered. Why should we poor women pay so dearly for our misdeeds? Yet the world forgives a man almost any crime but murder. If men could be hanged for the murder of souls and the breaking of hearts, there would not be lamp-posts enough in New Orleans for their execution. But God will not be so unjust,—with Him it is not a question of sex but of souls; and I believe that when you men stand before your Maker at the Great Tribunal you will be judged the same as we poor women."

"Come, come, Estelle; I did not come here to listen to a sermon. It's the same old story,—a woman never knows when to let go. You must remember my wife."

"Your wife, your wife,—remember her? My God! Would that I could forget her! Do not mention her name to me. I have murder in my heart when I think she has you and hates you,—yes, hates you,—while I, who adore you, cannot see you."

"Hush, woman; you are mad! I will not listen."

And Tracy drew her to the sofa, hoping that she would quiet down.

Fierce sobs shook her form. There was a time that the Colonel loved this woman and it was a strong battle that was being fought in his heart as to what was best to be done. Like all cowards, flight was the only thought that suggested itself. Taking his wallet from his pocket, he drew out several bills of large denomination, and pressed them into Estelle's hands.

"When you require more," he said, "send me word."

Little did Estelle know that it was Marian's money she was accepting for her pressing needs. He bent and kissed the bowed head, then he walked to the door, where he found Virginia waiting for him. She had been listening to all that had transpired between her mistress and the Colonel.

"Look after your mistress," he commanded. "Should she be ill, or need anything, come to my office."

He slipped a dollar into the servant's hand.

"Tanky, sir,—tanky, sir. Yassir. I'll take good care ob her, sir. Coming back soon again, Marse Dick?"

"No; I think not."

After Virginia closed the door she said to herself:

"He say he think not. Ha, ha! Well, we will see."

After the Colonel returned home his mind was too full of the past to drown the memory of that heartbroken woman that loved him not wisely but too well. He sat and smoked the night through, until Henry surprised him with his early morning coffee.

"Not well dis mornin', Colonel?"

"No; and I do not wish to be disturbed. I don't want any breakfast."

"Yassir; any message fer Miss Marian?"

"No, nothing. I am not at all well, that's all."

The morning air was fragrant, soft, and balmy; the mocking birds were whistling their lay; the bright sun streamed in through the half-closed blinds of Marian's chamber and seemed to say: "For shame, you laggard!" Marian opened her eyes as Becky entered with her coffee.

"Has Henry taken his master's coffee to him yet?"

"Yes, chile; an' two cocktails. He so power-

ful tired dis mornin'—he ain't never went to bed las' night. He tole Henry he were gwine to de office; he ain't gwine wait fer no breakfas'."

"Get my wrapper; I will see him at once."

A moment later Marian entered her husband's room and found him in no pleasant frame of mind. His linen was soiled and his hair disheveled,—not a pleasant sight for a young wife to look upon. Marian seated herself, uninvited, and bided her time.

"Well, madame; you honor me this morning. I am somewhat pressed for time, but I am at your service. What can I do for you?"

Ignoring his remarks, Marian asked abruptly: "Richard, how long is this going to be kept up?"

"I don't understand you, my dear wife."

"You were out all night again last night and have not removed your clothes."

"I am a sorry sight, I'll admit. But, to the point: What do you want of me?"

"Richard, you treat me like a child. It's about time I knew something of your business affairs. I dislike Captain Watkins; he is not a gentleman, and I am sure that he is after no good."

"He is after no good when he is after me, I grant you. But, my dear, you misjudge him. He is my friend, and our business is in such shape at present that it depends a great deal upon him whether we succeed or not. Don't

trouble your pretty little head with unnecessary worry. Trust your old husband to do the right thing."

"No; I will not be put off again. I insist upon knowing what your business is."

"Madame, you forget yourself. But I have no objection to telling you that your humble servant has gone into the wrecking business. I have bought the steamboat *Dixie*. Captain Watkins, Thomas McCall, and Captain Scott are my partners. They are experienced men in the business, but have no money. They do the work and I receive a certain portion of the net receipts. I expect great things, Marian. We will be rich beyond your fondest dreams, and then I can show my pretty little wife how her old husband loves her. When I can give you jewels, silks, and satins to adorn your beauty, —why, Marian, you will be the envy of all your friends."

Marian's indignation grew as her husband told her of his wild scheme:

"You seem to have forgotten how you have robbed me in the past by just such folly. I cannot, I will not, permit any further wrong to be done to my sisters and myself. Do you forget the man that shot at you, when we were on Camp Street together, because he said you had robbed him?"

"Hush, woman; you talk like a fool. Because a man has failed in one thing, does it stand to

reason that he will always be a failure? I have struck the right thing now. I expect to make good all that was squandered,—do you like the word 'squandered'?—of your fortune and a great deal more. I tell you now, madame, I do not intend to be dictated to by a chit of a schoolgirl."

And the Colonel looked angrily at his wife; yet even as he looked his face flushed; for the words of Estelle rang in his ear: "She hates you,—she hates you,—that chit of a schoolgirl wife."

Marian, not fearing her husband, faced him in his anger, and said: "I shall find means to protect myself in the future, sir."

Just then Henry came to the door, announcing: "Captain Watkins in de parlor, sir."

"Tell him I will be with him in a moment."

Marian returned to her room, nervous and exhausted after her interview with her husband.

"Honey," said Becky, "how you like dis little blanket I jist finished fer de baby? I wish I could embroid'y,—I would like to put on it 'Angels eber bright an' fair,—baby dear, —angels watch over you.' "

Marian smiled at her old nurse.

"I shall appoint you the guardian angel, Becky," she said, "when the little one comes to us. Oh, you dear old faithful nurse, your

mistress is so unhappy! My heart will break."

"There, there, honey; don't fret! You gwine to see better days bimeby. Ain't dis de loveliest day? Let me put on your hat, chile, an' take you for a walk in de garden. It will cheer you up. An' den Sally will hab a nice breakfas' to tempt you, honey."

Marian did as her old nurse advised, and felt much better afterwards. But as to the tempting breakfast Sally set before her, she was too heartsick to eat it. In her bitter anguish she thought of what was to become of her and the little one that was to bless and comfort her. Yes, what would become of them? She was too young to have acquired the conviction that the shoulders are fashioned to fit each burden and that suffering is necessary to us all. It is a wise Providence that orders our lives. How vast, how wonderful, are its ways! We struggle,—we fight for freedom; the shackles that bind us tighten, until we are left a poor, bleeding mass, unconquered, still rebellious at what we call the injustices of God. As we lay moaning at our lot, a bright light comes to us. It is the spiritual illumination that gives us courage to look up.

Behold, when we seek the Divine Throne in earnest, and pray for help and guidance, how soon the shackles drop from us! Like the dear Christ, we show the wounds, but, alas! not as did He, the Great Redeemer of all mankind,

who suffered and died that we may all be saved. Our wounds prove to us that Divine Providence has made us suffer to make us strong, and that, all in good time, the will of the Heavenly Father will be made known to us.

CHAPTER X

THE COLONEL'S DISAPPOINTMENT

THE house was wrapped in silence; all the members had retired for the night, or, at least, Colonel Tracy thought so, as he entered the library at a late hour. By the dim light of the student's lamp on the table he saw Henry asleep in his easy-chair. The negro's dreams must have been pleasant, for his face beamed, and his white teeth glistened between his great red lips. His master stood for a moment gazing at him:

"Well; *you* are happy, at any rate. Would that I could dream like you."

Envious of the darky's pleasant dreams, the Colonel gave him a vicious kick on the shins, which made the poor old fellow jump to his feet. "What are you doing here asleep at this hour? No doubt you have been drinking."

"No, suh, Marse Dick; I 'clar' to goodness I only tasted de whiskey in dat 'canter, 'case I want make sure dat I put your 'ticular kind ob old Kentucky rye away dat yo keeps fer yo friends, an' I thought yo might want me when yo comes home; so I waits here."

"No, go to bed. I shan't need you to-night."

Becky came in that moment in great alarm. O Marse Dick, send Henry fer Dr. Stone. Miss Marian's bery, bery sick."

"Run, you hound, run for your life, and bring the doctor back with you," commanded Colonel Tracy, as he paced the floor in great unrest. "Shall I go to my wife, Becky?"

"As yo please, suh; howsomever yo can't he'p her, only de Doctor kin do dat now."

And she cast a wicked glance at the Colonel as she left the room to return to her mistress.

Marian had been taken suddenly ill, and her old nurse would brook no delay in sending for the doctor.

Henry soon returned with him,—a bright, cheery man, with snowwhite locks and a kindly, beaming face, who always had a merry jest and a happy word for every one. His patients loved him dearly. Many an eye, dim with the shadow of death, had gazed in mute appeal to that sympathetic face; none turned to him for help and failed to find it. How he did love to welcome a baby into this world of ours! He was in high glee when he could present either a bouncing boy or a pretty baby girl to its mother, and say:

"There, madam; what do you think of that?"

He had brought Marian into the world, and it was but just that he should welcome her first-born. He had often been asked:

"Why do you feel such joy to see a poor baby come into this wicked old world, so full of trouble and pain and so much sorrow?"

"Here, now," he would answer; "what's the matter with this world? It's good enough for me, and I have my doubts, my dear friend, whether you would care to leave it to explore the other world just yet. No, no; let well enough alone, and make the best of life while it lasts."

"Well, well," he said, as he entered Marian's chamber, "what's up here that you dare drag a poor old doctor out of his bed at this unearthly hour? You'll have to get a younger man. I can't stand it."

Going over to Marian's bed, his tone changed. "My dear child, how do you feel? Cheer up, little woman; we will have things in great shape in no time. By sunrise we may have a son to present to the Colonel."

"I hope I may have a daughter," said Marian.

"Well, we'll have it a girl, if the Lord is willing. Becky, have you everything in readiness?"

"Yas, Doctor; but I would like so much to habe Mammy Sophy cum an' nurse de baby; 'case I can't 'tend to bofe."

"We'll send Henry for her at once."

Mammy Sophy had always had the babies of that household in her care from the time of their

birth until they were old enough to be trusted to the care of their respective nurses. Dr. Stone went down into the library to chat with the Colonel, and to await developments.

"Have a cigar, Doctor? Will you have something to drink?"

"No, thanks; not just now. After a while perhaps."

"How do you find my wife?"

"Doing very nicely. Becky asked to have Mammy Sophy sent for, as she feels that she can't do her duty by both mother and child."

"I had anticipated that; and I knew my wife would wish it. Sophy may be here at any moment, as Henry has been gone a long time."

Voices were heard in the hall. Mammy Sophy came in, blowing and puffing like a steam tub,—because of the pace at which Henry had kept her going in an effort to keep up with him; he urging her on by saying: "Come on, Mammy Sophy; yo knows bery well dat Miss Marian gwine ter be bery anxious an' onstropolious till yo gits dar. Becky's all right in her way, but when it cums to de baby, dat am a discussable point as to her caperbilities as a nuss."

"Yas, yo is right, Henry," she replied. "Whar is dar a nuss like me, I wanter know, in dis hyar city, or any odder city, fer dat matter? Becky's all right,—'deed she is, de Lord ferbid dat I gwine ter 'spute dat fact,—but dis

hyar nigger knows mo 'bout babies in er minuet dan any ob de doctors. I gwine pointedly tell Dr. Stone: 'Yo hand dat baby ter me w'en it cums; an' I don't kar if you don't neber look at it agin. Ise 'sponsible fer it.' "

At last she reached Marian's room. She approached the bed, kissed her young mistress tenderly on the hair, and taking her little white hands in her great black ones, she tried to cheer and comfort her in her agony.

"Bar up, chile; yo's passin' froo de same agony dat yo pore ma passed froo fer yo."

"Oh, Mammy; I wish I had never been born. I am so unhappy. God grant that my child will never live to say the same thing."

"Hush, chile! Don't say dat. Yo make me real 'dignant at yo. Didn't de Blessed Mother suffer fer our dear Lord? Wah we all be if it warn't fer dat? Yo just answer me. Now yo gotter do your part as well. I hear Edmond read furm de Holy Book, 'Go ye an' multiply de yearth.' Yo gotter fulfill de Scripture, chile. Becky, wah's de basket? Is everything all ready? Lor' amassy, it's five o'clock!"

"Yas, Mammy Sophy, I recons yo would like some coffee. Sally's in de kitchen. I'll go git yo some."

"I wush yo would, Becky, 'case fer de way dat oudacious Henry done run me here was a caution to Moses. Bring Miss Marian a strong cup too."

While Becky went for the coffee, Mammy Sophy tried to keep up Marian's courage. It was not long before the Doctor was called upstairs. When everything was over, the Doctor went down to the dining-room, where the Colonel was sitting at the table. his untouched breakfast before him.

"Well, sir," said the Doctor, "with your permission, I will now drink to the health of the mother and daughter."

"What's that, Doctor? A girl? I am disgusted. I wanted a boy,—a son."

The Doctor looked at him with contempt, and with a merry laugh said:

"Better luck next time. I will see your wife in a few hours again. Good-morning."

The days wore on, and Marian was convalescing very rapidly. She could now sit up for a short time each day and hold her baby, while Mammy Sophy and Becky arranged the bed. Is there a picture more beautiful than that of a young mother looking into the tiny face of her first-born?

Mrs. Baynard and her family sent flowers and dainties each day by the black man, Jim. He looked quite like the quality folks, dressed up in Mr. Baynard's cast-off clothes.

"Dat Jim do weary me; he's er-sittin' up to Sally in er mos' scandelious way. If he don't 'spect ter call in de preacher, cuming here ebery day, wid dat old domino face ob his'n all shined

wid pot-lickker 'till tar would make er mark on it, I don't see why Sally fool her time wid him."

Sally bitterly resented Mrs. Baynard's sending dainties. As she said to Jim:

"I don't see why your mistress take de trouble to send my mistress dis chicken soup, an' all dem jellies. It's er insult ter me, an' Ise gwine ter tell her so, too. I kin tempt my Missus' appetite better'n that no-count cook ob her'n. Mahaly don't want ter trifel wid me. If she knowed wat I knows she gwine duck her head, I kin tell yo."

"What's dat, Sister Sally?"

"No; I ain't gwine ter tell yer, case Miss Marian would be grieved at me."

"My dear Sister Sally," said the wily Jim, taking her hand and looking into her face, with his eyes rolled heavenward, "you knows yo pleasure is mine. I got no time fer Mahaly, and anything yo tells me is as good as buried."

"Go 'way, you old swaysine nigger! Yo don't need ter roll your eyes at me like er duck in a thunder storm. I ain't gwine ter tell yo nothing."

"Cum now, honey, Ise waiting'. Tell yo Jim."

"You won't tell?"

"Nothin' could squeeze it out'n me."

"Draw up your chair; case Ise got ter w'isper."

Jim did so and slipped his arm around

Sally's ample waist,—a fact she chose to ignore.

"Well, you know Mahaly, she's chuckling ober de fact she's 'viding de dainties fer Miss Marian, an' Mammy Sophy sayin' ebery day, 'You can't eat dis, chile,—not yet.' Miss Marian she say: 'You eat dem, Mammy.' An' 'deed she do, smakin' her mouf on Mahaly's goodies. Nigger, if you eber tell, I ain't sayin' nothin', but,—revenge is sweet, dat's all."

"Dat's so. Yo is a oncommonly smart woman, Sally; an' any man mought be proud to marry you."

"Go on, nigger! I ain't beggin' to get married. I kin git married any day I wants. So, dar!"

"Well, da, da, my honeysuckle. Tell Becky to tell yo misses dat de ladies gwine ter cum ober arter lunch."

Sally returned to her work, singing:

> Hard trials, great tribulations!
> Most don' workin' in de crosses;
> Goin' to ma home bimeby.

"Mammy Sophy," said Becky, "Mrs. Wickham, Mrs. Baynard, and Miss Irene's downstairs. Kin dey cum up?"

"Lors amassy, yes! I guess Miss Marian be glad to see 'em."

Mammy Sophy waited at the door to welcome the visitors.

"Howdy, howdy, ladies? Come right in,"

she cried in greeting. "Miss Irene, yo luks like a water lily; 'deed yo do. Yo will do Mis' Marian a heap ob good. She is real peart, and dat's de most oncommon baby I eber saw."

"Now, Mammy Sophy," laughed Mrs. Wickham, "I fear you are getting silly in your old age. If I mistake not, you thought Marian the most uncommon baby."

"Well, I ain't had no 'casion ter change my 'pinion. I think Miss Marian de most oncommonest person I ever did know. Ain't dis her baby? But cum right in an' see fo yo'self."

The ladies went into raptures over the baby. Addie asked if she might hold it for a little while; and tears filled her eyes as she thought of the little one that was given to her for a few short weeks only. Marian kissed her friend's tear-stained face:

"Never mind, dear," she said soothingly; "we will share her together. May she learn to love you as you deserve."

"Will is going away for a few days, Marian. May I come and read to you, and try and amuse you?"

"I should love to have you, dear."

"Now, Mammy Sophy, don't make 'mouths' at me. I promise to do as you say. Do let me come."

"Cum, chile, all yo wants; I don't mind, so's yo don't want ter nuss de baby an' spile her. Can't habe dat, nohow. Dis baby can't be

spiled. She's not like Marian, brung up in de lap ob luxury; dis chile am de chile ob adversity an' she can't be spiled, nohow."

"All right, Mammy Sophy; I will do as you say, but as long as I have a dollar, there will be no adversity for this baby."

CHAPTER XI

COLONEL TRACY'S OFFICE

COLONEL TRACY pleaded pressing business, and spent a great deal of his time at his office. His wife saw very little of him.

On entering his office one morning, he found his three friends and business associates awaiting him. They did not give one the impression of being in a very friendly mood. Captain Watkins sat, with insolent familiarity, his feet upon the desk. James McCall, from where he sat, was trying with all his might to accomplish the feat of having the tobacco juice, which he wished to expel from his unclean mouth, reach the cuspidor. Captain Scott had the morning paper and seemed to be interested in the river news.

"Look here, Tracy. What is the *Dixie* insured for,—and the cargo of the *Evangeline*?" asked Scott. "I fear we will have some trouble with the insurance company."

"I don't know. I will look over the books and ascertain."

"Then you had better get at it, as we must return to Red River to-night. The steamer is

in charge of the negro hands, and we cannot trust them. They have made all kinds of threats, because one of the black devils fell overboard, and we did not trouble to stop and fish him out. What does one nigger more or less matter anyway? Well, about the risk?"

"Gentlemen, I find that the insurance is all overdue. I cannot think how I came to let it expire. I can only say, the fault is mine."

"What!" exclaimed Captain Watkins, jumping to his feet. "That's a nice kettle of fish to be in. We have to have money at once to go on with the work and to pay the men. Our lives would not be worth a picayune to go up the Red River without the money."

"I have no money, gentlemen. We have not realized any on the money invested. I was under the impression that the last check I gave you would carry you through."

"Well, it did not," sneered Captain Watkins; "and you want to hand over another one at once,—do you understand? It's about time our services in this business were receiving some substantial return in the shape of a check from you. We are not working for glory and kingdom come,—we'll take that later on. We want cash at present,—good, hard cash."

"Gentlemen, you surprise me. I thought I was with friends. You would not deal double with me?"

"Oh, that's all right. But you can't mix

friendship with business,—they don't mix. We will do the friendship part in your hospitable home over your good old Kentucky rye when we have an invitation to spend an evening with you."

Colonel Tracy realized that he had desperate men to deal with, so he thought best to conciliate them, if he could.

"Well, well," he laughed. "You all know the old saying, 'honor among thieves.' So we understand each other and must pull together for our mutual benefit. I will accommodate you with the money as soon as I can, and you are welcome to the old Kentucky rye, I'm sure."

The three men bowed themselves out, with ironical politeness; and on reaching the street, Captain Watkins remarked:

"How long do you think we can squeeze that lemon?"

"Oh, he'll stand for it,—never fear! He'll not attempt to go against three such experienced wreckers as we are," replied Captain Scott.

It was a very serious problem for Colonel Tracy to solve,—how to get the money demanded of him. But work out the problem he knew he must. There was only one thing left for him to do: he must mortgage the St. Charles Street home. What could he tell Marian "to bring her to reason," as he called it, and

get her to sign the necessary papers? She had refused ever to part with the old home, come what may.

Placing his hat on his head, he started for home.

"The sooner done the sooner over. No use having disagreeable things hanging over you forever," he mused along the way.

Mrs. Wickham, with her daughters, was just leaving, after one of their usual visits, when the Colonel entered:

"You are quite a stranger," she said. "We have not seen you since you became a happy father,—and baby is a month old!"

They all shook hands, congratulating him on having so lovely a little daughter.

"Oh, I suppose she'll do, as babies go," was his ungracious answer, "but I am disgusted. I wanted a son. I hate girls."

"Really, now, you don't mean it! I should never think it. Pardon me; but you must mean girls in swaddling clothes. They all grow in time; so, take heart."

And, turning her back on him, Mrs. Wickham joined her daughters.

"How I hate that man!" she exclaimed fervently.

"Will tells me," said Mrs. Baynard, "that rumor has it that he is squandering Marian's fortune, and if something is not done, she will be a beggar. But that is not the worst of it;

he has a lady friend who receives benefits from Marian's money. Lord spare the poor child! I hope she will never know it."

Colonel Tracy was as vehement as Mrs. Wickham.

"I hate that old cat! She is nothing but a busybody and a mischief-maker. I am sure that she interferes in my affairs,—always putting fool notions in my wife's head. It will be harder for me to deal with Marian after that cat's visit. By George, what a beauty Irene has grown to be! She has eyes that would drive a man to the end of the earth; such lips! they are like poppies kissed by the dew,—enough to intoxicate a man to madness. Heighoh! a man can't pluck all the blossoms from the garden of Eden."

He entered the house and Marian met him at the door. He coughed in embarrassment, at her confronting him so unexpectedly; the guilty thought of Irene and the unpleasant subject of money that he was to broach to her made him ill at ease; but, like all men of similar nature, he was on the aggressive, as if in defiance of some real or imaginary slight.

"Well, Marian, I am glad to see you looking so well to-day."

"You are home early, Richard."

"Yes. The fact is, Marian, there is a little matter of business I want to talk over with you."

"Do you think I am old enough to discuss business with?" she sneered. Without replying, he led her to the parlor, placed a chair for her, and seated himself opposite.

"I have tried to spare you all unnecessary worry. You don't know much about business,—that's a fact." Then the Colonel coughed and hesitated before coming to the point. "You see, it is this way";—he began to pace the floor. "When a man's business gets to going wrong, there seems to be no end of trouble; it's like jumping from one big bog into another, until you are in the swamp up to your neck, as it were. That's my fix just at present. Now, to go further, you borrow from one to pay another, then borrow of another to pay back. Damn queer, ain't it? Do you get my meaning?"

"I cannot say that I do, from the way that you put it to me, but I infer you are in want of money."

Tracy raised his voice to impress upon his wife the importance of his argument; he felt that the louder he talked the more impressed she would be. This had little effect on Marian. She knew that her husband was a very poor business man. She had a clear, energetic, and practical mind, and force of character, being, in fact, her husband's superior in every sense of the word.

"Let us not continue this unnecessary con-

versation. It is urgent,—imperative,—that you sign some papers to-morrow to save yourself and sisters from beggary, and me from ruin. Yes, I said 'ruin.'" For Marian had looked at him in amazement. "I have put it to you in a comprehensive manner. Now, suit yourself, madam."

Marian left the room.

In the morning she prepared herself to accompany her husband to his office. As they entered a lean, weazened man, with shifty eyes, came toward them.

"My wife, Lawyer Moss," was the Colonel's introduction.

"I hope you are enjoying good health, madam," said Moss, as he extended a claw-like hand to her.

Marian ignored both the greeting and the hand.

"Come, come, Moss; to business! Have you the papers ready?"

"Yes; I have them here. Shall I explain them to Mrs. Tracy?"

"We will not trouble her to go over the papers."

"Law papers are very incomprehensible to the ladies, I find; and it would be my pleasure to explain everything to your perfect satisfaction." Moss smiled a sickly smile.

Colonel Tracy stepped on his foot, and remarked:

"I will explain. There is a mortgage on some of the property, and it must be met, or it will be foreclosed. Lawyer Moss will advance the money, Marian, if you will give him a lien on the old homestead. I shall have ample funds to meet that from our business long before it falls due. It only requires your signature to that document to get the money."

"No, I cannot do it."

"Very well then, Moss, we will call it off. I thought my wife would protect herself and sisters."

As Tracy thought, in that remark he had played his trump card. Marian demurred no longer, signed the papers, while the old lawyer chuckled,—washing his very long hands in imaginary water, at the back of Marian's chair.

"Is that all you require of me?"

"No hurry, dear. I will call a cab and send you home."

While Marian stood waiting, Captain Watkins, McCall, and Scott entered.

"Good morning, Mrs. Tracy; fine morning!"

Marian shrank from the approach of these men; they seated themselves, uninvited, and looked at her with an insolent stare that made the blood mount, in indignation, to her cheek.

"Well, Colonel, heard the news?"

Tracy winked at his visitors to keep quiet.

Marian, turning to her husband, said:

"I can go home alone. Your business is very pressing, no doubt."

As soon as she had left the office, McCall spoke up for the others.

"Well, the *Dixie* was burned to the water's edge. Dead loss,—no insurance,—thanks to your way of doing business. Got the money for us?"

"I have arranged, as Moss will tell you, for the money. He will be here to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"All right; we will be here, too. You may be sure of that, old man."

"Say, Colonel, that's a damned pretty wife for such an old fraud as you are," said Watkins.

"Hound!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Hold your tongue! Don't go too far, or you may exhaust even my patience."

"Oh, no offense, Colonel. Good-day. See you to-morrow. So long, Moss."

When the men reached the street Captain Scott stopped.

"Gentlemen," he said, "a word with you. This is as good a place as any for what I have to say. I am heartily tired of all this dirty business. That little woman's face would appeal to a heart of stone, and I, for one, don't intend to be a party to robbing her of her property any longer. I've just learned that Colonel Tracy never had a damned cent; he married his ward

and got her to sign over to him most of her property, and I wouldn't be surprised if the last wasn't signed over to that thief Moss this morning. It is her money that has gone into this scheme, and, by God! I'm through. Oh, you may laugh and think it a huge joke; but I stand for that poor little woman and her baby. Call me a shouting Methodist, if you like, but that's how I feel about it."

His companions slapped him on the back.

"By Jove, that was great! You missed your vocation; you ought to have gone on the stage; you would have made a great actor," said Watkins.

"No; better still," said McCall, "we will have him pass the plate in the church next Sunday. He is so conscience-stricken at his wrong-doing, there is no hope for him."

Then the laugh died on their faces; they turned upon him, like beasts of prey. "By God!" they cried; "betray us and your old carcass will be food for the fish."

"As you will, gentlemen; but I am through. No more for me."

And Scott turned on his heel and left them.

The men faced each other.

"What do you think of that? Can we trust him?" asked Watkins.

"I guess we will have to," replied McCall. "He would not relish a dose of cold lead, I'm thinking."

CHAPTER XII

OPHELIA AT THE PLAY

As Colonel Tracy had gone up the Red River after the burning of the *Dixie,* Marian felt it would be an auspicious time to have her friend Mrs. Baynard come to make her a visit; so she wrote to Addie that, if convenient, she would appreciate it very much to have her with her while the Colonel was away, adding:

"I have so much to tell you. Don't fail me, if you can help it. I know at best I am poor company. But you alone understand me. So, come."

She dispatched the note, and in a short time Mrs. Baynard bounced into the room.

"I did not wait to answer your note, Marian. I inferred that I should be welcome at any time, —the sooner the better. It is quite a coincidence. Will had to go East on business, so now we shall have a time together, and I can nurse that precious baby all I want, can't I, Mammy Sophy?"

"Dat's it, Miss Addie; yo ax me de most unreasonable things. Yo just can't spile dis chile. Yo nuss Miss Marian; she needs comforting, de Lord knows. I'll nuss de baby."

Mammy did not object to the baby's being rocked when she did it herself, so she rocked and sang.

> De golden light am streamin' in;
> I har de russel ob de angel's wing.
> To watch an' watch while my baby sleeps.
> I washed my feet in de Ribber Jordan,
> To climb de golden stairs.

So sang the old nurse while the ladies conversed.

Ophelia, Sally's little half-sister from the Coast, came tiptoeing into the room and handed Marian a letter: "Mars' Dick must 'a' drapped it out'n his pocket last night, case I found it on de floor dis now, wen I was a-dustin' de liberry under his chair. So I done brung it to you, Miss Marian."

"That was right. Give it to me."

Marian noticed after taking the letter that it was addressed to her husband in a woman's handwriting,—writing that was unfamiliar to her. She did not have the courage to take the letter from the envelope; she feared, she did not know what. Let it be what it might she would not read it. Said Addie:

"Let me read it, Marian. You owe it to yourself to know who takes the liberty of writing to your husband."

"He would have told, had he wished me to know."

"Never fear," said her friend, who knew of

the Colonel's perfidy, and who dreaded the consequence to Marian, if by any evil chance she should ever find it out for herself, and who was determined to read that letter, come what may. "Come now; let me read it. If it is all right, no harm is done; if not,—well, what then?" Marian handed the letter to Addie. It was the one the Colonel had received from Estelle. Marian watched her friend as she read, and seeing the flush of indignation that flashed across her face, she knew the worst and wept in silent misery at her unhappy lot. Addie folded the letter, replaced it in the envelope, and turning toward Marian, said tenderly, sympathetically:

"What shall I do with it?" And she held it away from her, as if she feared contamination.

"Destroy it; I don't want to know the contents. Let's dismiss the unpleasant subject. Tell me some news, Addie."

"There isn't much of importance,—really. You remember that old friend of Mamma's,—the one we always called the cackling old hen? Well, she has departed this life. Mamma went to the funeral this afternoon. You remember she never had any children of her own, so she took it upon herself to correct everybody's else children. What an old bugbear she was to us, with her 'O girls, how you do act! Girls were never so rude in my young days.' Now, Marian,

I can tell by your eyes that you have a splitting headache. Don't deny it, to be polite; for I am going to take a walk in the garden. Mammy Sophy, make her lie down and take a nap."

Addie selected a book to read, and thought she would have a quiet time in the old vine-covered arbor; but on her way she encountered Ophelia with Nero, the great Newfoundland dog.

"Come into the arbor, Ophelia, and talk to me."

The negro girl threw herself down on the floor beside Mrs. Baynard, and looked up questioningly into her face.

"Where did you come from, Ophelia?"

"I don't cum fum nowah. I jist hyar. I cum fum de kitchen de las' place."

Mrs. Baynard could not help laughing at the child's ingenious way of answering her question.

"Ophelia, where is your mother?"

"She dead."

"And your father?"

"Same too. All dead, 'sept Aunt Sally. She my half-sister, I reckon. Anyhow she done 'lated to me somehow, case de preacher fum de coas' done writ her dat de church 'ciety too poor to keep me, an' she must take me. She tell Miss Marian, an' Miss Marian writ right back, an' sont de money in de letter, an' say send de chile to her. An' har I be."

"Ophelia, have you ever been to the matinée?"

"What's dat, Miss Addie?"

"Why, a theater, where there are lights, and music, and a grand play."

"No'm; I ain't been no sich place."

"I will take you to see the 'Two Orphans' to-day. Run along and put on your best clothes."

"Yas'm; but Aunt Sally gwine ter ax me if dat is de house ob de debil; case I heard her tell Jim Nickerson, your colored man, Miss Addie, dat de theater is de playhouse ob de debil. An' Ise afeared she ain't gwine ter let me go."

"You just tell her that I am going to take you. When you are all dressed and ready, come to Miss Marian's room."

"Yas'm."

And Ophelia started off in high glee, with Nero at her heels, while Mrs. Baynard returned to the house.

"Marian, dear," she said, "I hope you are better. I have such a lark on hand; and I know there will be no end of fun; so I want you to come with us."

"With us? What do you mean, Addie?"

"Why, I am going to take Ophelia to the matinée, to-day. Do come! I know you will enjoy it."

"I wish I could; but I am not equal to it,—my head aches so badly. I wish you joy. Where is Ophelia? I want to see how she looks."

"Hyar me."

And, sure enough, there she stood, grinning from ear to ear, all dressed up in her Sunday best, with her yellow ribbon tied around her woolly head. Ophelia was a picture. Sally had greased and slicked her wool until it stuck to her head in defiance of every wind that might blow. Her face shone like bronze.

"Is I all right, Miss Marian?"

Being reassured, and conscious of her new clothes and Sally's parting admonition to " 'have yourself like a lady," Ophelia started off for the matinée.

On entering, the girl was full of wonder and surprise. The orchestra was playing the latest waltz. Ophelia sat spellbound, and when the music ceased she whispered:

"W'at gwine cum on now?"

"Hush; just watch the curtain."

As Mrs. Baynard spoke, the curtain rose on the first act. Ophelia held on to her companion's dress, as if she feared for her life; and as the play progressed, she panted with tense excitement. She could not keep her seat; it was almost impossible to control her, and when, toward the end of the play, Madame Frochard pushed the blind girl up the garret stairs, and shut her in the dark room, the child exclaimed: "O Lord, hab massy on dat pore gal!"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Baynard.

"Hush," said the people seated near them.

Ophelia grabbed Mrs. Baynard's handkerchief and stuffed it in her mouth, to keep from crying out, in the scene where the Sister Henriette, searching for her blind sister Louise, enters the Frochard home, and creeps quietly about, saying:

"Can it be my poor little sister, in this miserable place?" The audience was hushed in expectancy; not a sound could be heard, only the voice of Henriette, calling for Louise: "Oh, where, where can she be,—my little sister!"

This was too much for the overwrought nerves of Ophelia. Jumping to her feet, she rushed into the aisle, calling out in a loud voice, hoarse with excitement:

"You fool gal, yo sister's up in dat garret." Some one in the audience called to her: "Sit down, you crazy nigger!"

"I ain't gwine ter sit down fer nobody,—not 'till dat gal done find her sister, 'fore dat debilish ole 'oman gits back. If I kin git in dat ere house Ise gwine ter he'p her."

The theater echoed with applause. Mrs. Baynard seized her charge by the arm and hurried her away. The notoriety was somewhat more than she had anticipated.

On reaching home, she related her experience, much to Marian's amusement.

"Wat could yo expect, Miss Addie, fum dat coast nigger anyhow?" said Becky. "You

won't try it agin in a hurry. She must er done shamed you ter death."

"No, indeed; it was great fun. I only wish Marian could have been there."

Ophelia was "no ercount on earth," as Sally expressed it, "arter she done went to de house ob de debil," and as the girl related to her parts of the play, she would exclaim:

"Dar, wat I done tole yo; ain't dat Madame Fousad er ole she-debil? And dat rapscallion son o' her'n, ain't dey de chillen ob Satan? Wat fer dey want treat dat pore blind gal and dat hunchback cripple boy dater way? Dey is de chillen ob God, case de Scripture say: 'Suffer you chillen dat want 'er cum to me.' He knows de blind an' de cripple chillen suffer, an' dey de ones dat goes to de Kindom ob Heaben wah dey shall see an' be made whole. Go on dar now, Ophelia, an' rub up dem knives, an' don't prance eround here in dat manner. It gwine ter take many er prayer ter push yo froo de Heabenly Gates,—if yo so happen to cotch dem on de jar w'en de times cums fer yo ter go."

"Aunt Sally, w'at fer yo rant at me dater way? De preacher on de coast done tell ebery-body w'en my mudder died dat I was a most likely chile, and dat he reckon I gwine ter be a big he'p ter yo. I prays fo yo, Aunt Sally, ebery night, an' I axes de good Lord to open your eyes to de sins ob de world, an' let de

blessed light shine in on your soul. De preacher say yo don't habe ter pray ter be free, yo is free; but dar's de same ole traiter, Satan, biddin' fer yo soul,—white an' black all de same,—an' it behooves yo all ter keep yer lamps trimmed and burnin', case Satan don't stop at de church door,—he goes right on up ter de pulpit."

"Hump!" grunted Sally. "Outen de mouffs ob de babies cums wisdom. You right, chile, I gwine pray."

Whereupon she began at once to sing:

A woman in Nazareth was black wid sin,
An' Jesus wash 'er white as snow.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

This finished, Sally handed Ophelia a hunk of cake.

"Dar," she said; "go on outen de kitchen an' play; I don't need yo now."

The child's words had sunk deep into Sally's heart, and Ophelia had so grown in her esteem that many a favor did she receive at the cook's hands. Indeed, life was made easy from that time on for the little black orphan from the coast.

CHAPTER XIII

BELL'S ELOPEMENT

BELL and Jennie, Marian's younger sisters and Colonel Tracy's wards, had been at the convent at Bay St. Louis for several years. Mother Colombe had written that the rapidly failing health of Jennie was a serious matter, and was causing her a great deal of anxiety, and that she thought the child should be taken home at once.

Marian looked forward with pleasure to the homecoming of her sisters. But her heart ached for Jennie. The poor child had always been frail, and Mrs. Meridith had always felt that she would not be able to keep her with her long. However, by the dispensation of Providence, she had survived her dear mother by several years; and it was now Marian's duty to fill her mother's place to her as best she could. It was a serious responsibility for one so young, with such a home, to shelter two young girls.

"But," sighed Marian, "I shall be amply repaid in having her with me. I am so lonely. While my little one fills my heart, there will be a big corner in its secret recess for her."

The rumbling of wheels and the snapping of

a whip announced the arrival of the carriage. Marian went out to the gates to welcome her sisters home. Bell jumped from the carriage, and throwing her arms around Marian, cried:

"I am so glad to get home. What an age we have been shut up in that old convent! I suppose Brother Dick would have left us there until we died of old age. I shan't go back. I am home for good."

While she rattled on, Becky was gently lifting the frail, little invalid from the carriage. At the sight of her, Marian was overcome; but she fought down her emotions, not wanting to betray to that spiritual little creature that she realized that the thread of her young life was so near to breaking.

Jennie's sweet, gentle nature made its impression upon all. She was as a shuttle filled with golden strands, weaving into each life that came in contact with hers a glittering thread. Even the irrepressible Bell was gentleness itself in her presence. Ophelia stood in mute wonder as she saw Becky place the little one on the sofa in the great cool parlor. Indeed every one was solicitous for her comfort.

Jennie saw the little negro girl gazing at her, with sympathy she dare not express, and asked:

"Who is that child, Marian?"

"That's Ophelia,—Sally's half-sister. She's an orphan, and came from down the coast."

"I should like very much to have her to wait on me. I know I shall like her."

"My dear little sister, you shall have her for your own private use,—to do with her as you wish."

"I thank you, Marian."

Jennie called Ophelia to her. The child, drawn by the same sweet influence that was felt by others, threw herself on the floor by Jennie's feet, and from that hour Ophelia was as the invalid's very shadow. She slept beside her on a cot at night, and watched over her, anticipating every wish of her little white mistress.

Colonel Tracy, who had returned home, came to extend a welcome. He kissed Jennie, and felt a pang to see her so sadly changed. I doubt not that down in his heart he felt the keenest remorse for the wrong he had done those intrusted in his care, but ere conscience could cause pain Bell rushed up to him and said:

"Well, here I am. Look at me. I am seventeen,—a grown-up young lady. Do you realize that you have so grand a personage on your hands, Brother Dick?"

"Well," he said, looking first at his wards then at his wife, "this reminds me of a kindergarten." And he laughed.

"Indeed? Well, I want some money to go out shopping to-morrow, as I intend to discard my pinafores at once, sir," said Bell.

"Not so fast, young lady; you will have to go

to some finishing school for two or three years more."

"We shall see!" said Bell, and she flounced out of the room. She could do nothing quietly. As Becky said: "Eberything is in a hurrah w'en dat gal's round."

The next morning she was ready for the shopping expedition. As soon as she had had her breakfast, her guardian told her that she might get what she required at Braselman's and Adam's, as his wife had an account there. So off she started, with Becky as chaperon.

"Say, Becky, I want to go see Mrs. Baynard first. She will tell me what to get. I did not want to ask poor Marian. She is so afraid of that old demon she would restrict me too much."

"All right, Miss Bell. It's yo business."

When they reached Mrs. Baynard's, Bell rushed past the maid, who opened the door in answer to their ring, and, with a bound, stood before the amazed woman.

"Of all things!" exclaimed Addie. "Where did you come from? When did you get home?"

"Yesterday. Oh, I am in such a hurry! I have not a moment to spare."

"You had better call again, then, when you have more time to spare."

"Now, please don't be cross, because I want your help. You know how Marian is; she has grown absolutely stupid since her marriage to

Mephistopheles. Why, you can smell sulphur all over the house."

"For shame, Bell! But, what do you want me to do for you?"

"I want you to make out a list of what I need. Becky is downstairs waiting for me; we are going shopping. You know what a young lady needs for her coming out."

"Coming out!" exclaimed Mrs. Baynard. "You know, Bell, that your guardian will never let Marian have a coming-out party for you."

"Well, I don't intend to ask him. You are, next to Marian, my dearest and best friend. Why should it not be you, I should like to know?"

"Bell, you are incorrigible."

"Yes, I know. But you won't fail me, I am sure."

"I shall consult Marian; and no doubt we may be able to arrange to have your party."

Addie turned to her desk to write out the list. It was while thus engaged that Mrs. Baynard felt Bell place her hands on her shoulders and heard her whisper:

"I am going to run away and get married. Now, don't jump, and I will tell you all about it, if you will promise me you won't tell Marian."

"How did you ever have the opportunity of seeing any young men,—shut up in the convent so long?"

"Oh, pshaw! We can make opportunities if we want to. But, you see, I grasped mine. There now, don't look frightened. I just know that you are as curious as can be to know all about it. Well, listen, and I will tell you: Clara Morris, my friend, has an aunt at Bay St. Louis, who has a summer home. Well, she has a son (see the connection? No?) Well, Mother Colombe knows Mrs. Morris, and the aforesaid son spends every Sunday with his mother, and lives the rest of the time in the city. Clara and I were permitted to visit Mrs. Morris whenever we pleased. Mother Colombe did not remember the son. Now, there is the key to the combination. He is the dearest fellow in the world, and I know you will say so, too, when you see him at my coming-out party. Now that that's all settled, I'll take my list and go. Remember this is all *entre nous*."

It was very evident that Bell had won Mrs. Baynard over to her side, for the party came off in due time. It was one of the successes of the season. Mrs. Baynard was very favorably impressed with Charles Morris, Bell having given her ample opportunity to become acquainted at the party. She assured the young people that she would do all she could to help them.

After his talk with Mrs. Baynard, Morris sought Bell, who was waiting for him in a quiet

nook in the corner of the stairway. They discussed their plans for the future.

"I am ashamed to act the cad, Bell. Let me speak to your guardian."

"Well, do; and I shall be packed off to the convent, or some other school. He would never give his consent, out of sheer cussedness."

Just then Becky came with her wraps, as the hour was late,—or rather early in the morning. A party in the South meant an all-night frolic. Becky stepped back in the shadow when she saw the affectionate parting of the young lovers, but she kept her counsel, and did not betray them.

Bell was not herself for days after that night. Marian questioned her, but could not gain her confidence.

"Oh, I don't feel well. Don't worry about me, sister dear; it will all come out in the wash, no doubt."

The thought of leaving Jennie preyed upon her mind and made her waver in her purpose; she feared she would never look upon that sweet face again; she had been such a help and comfort to her.

One day Bell said to Marian:

"I am going to Clara Morris's to spend a day or two. Don't fret if I am longer than that. Just send me word how you all are."

"I think it will do you good, Bell; stay as long as you like."

When Bell kissed Jennie good-by, tears streamed down her cheeks. She felt that it was good-by forever.

"Why, sister; I would not go if I felt so badly. But dear Clara will be so happy to have you. Run along, dear, and have a good time."

"There! I know I am a silly thing, but I can't help it."

And smiling through her tears, Bell left the room.

A week went by; but Marian felt no anxiety because of her absent sister's silence.

"The heedless girl! She does not think it worth while to write us a line," was her only comment; but the little invalid remembered how her sister had looked when she bade her good-by, and she feared that something was wrong. She asked Marian to send Henry to Clara's home to inquire for her sister. When Henry returned he handed Marian a note from Bell, which ran as follows:

DEAREST SISTER MARIAN:

I could not endure it any longer, to remain under that roof. It is hard enough for you, dear; but for me, impossible. Such an uncongenial atmosphere to be in! My saintly little sister, I fear, will not be with you long; but you, dear, how I pity you! There is no release for you.

Charley Morris, Clara's cousin, has taken it upon himself to make me happy for life, so he says, and relieve my "Dear Guardian" of all future care.

We were married to-day, and sail at once for dear old England, where my husband (don't that sound great?) is going into business. I don't know when you will receive this letter, as I begged Clara not to send it until you sent to inquire about me.

Charley's family lawyer will call on my guardian in regard to my property. Kiss my dear little sister for me. I would have loved to have seen you all again before I left, but it was impossible. With much love to you both.

Your ever loving sister.

BELL.

P. S. I will write you from London. Kiss everybody for me,—white and black alike. I love you all. B.

There was great commotion in the house when Colonel Tracy heard the news. He stormed and raved, shaking his fist at Marian and saying:

"You were a party to this, no doubt."

He would not believe that she, too, had been left in ignorance.

"Who is the damn fortune hunter? Let him send his family lawyer to me! Ha, ha! I shall settle him in short order."

But in truth it was the fear of accounting for Bell's money that made him rave so, for he knew full well that ducks and drakes had been made of the girl's fortune, as well as that of Marian and poor little Jennie. Oh, the wounded heart of poor Marian! It hurt her so to think that she had not had Bell's confidence.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Baynard entered the room to find Marian in tears.

"What's up now?" she asked. "Always tears!"

Marian handed her friend Bell's letter, and bid her read it. Addie laughed, saying: "Good for her! I only hope that she will be happier than you have been in your married life. I had

a long talk with Charley Morris, and I think he is a fine young fellow. I knew all about it, for Bell had made me her confidante because she did not want to worry you. I am sure that all will be well with the truant lovers. So dry your tears, dear, and worry no more about them."

CHAPTER XIV

JENNIE'S DEATH. ESTELLE AND THE BABY

Mrs. Baynard had made her peace with Marian for conspiring against her in Bell's marriage.

"I felt, Marian dear, that you were helpless in regards to helping her yourself, as Colonel Tracy would have prevented any such thing as Bell's getting from under his control. He knew, no doubt, that the moment that she married her husband would demand an accounting of her fortune, and I fancy that he does not relish that."

"No, I fear not. I myself cannot get any satisfaction when I question him, and I am heartily glad that Mr. Morris's lawyer will call him to account. It is Bell's right. She should know what is left of her property."

Meanwhile, the little invalid grew steadily worse. Ophelia was her constant companion. She would amuse her mistress by the hour, telling of the time she went to "de mattinee" to see the *Two Orphans*. She could never forgive Mrs. Baynard, because, as she said:

"She wouldn't let me he'p dat gal find her sister."

Then she would tell of the ghost stories she had heard down the coast. "Dey would make yo hyar stand on de end, Miss Jennie; dey was dat fearful!"

"Dear child, you cannot believe that those that have gone before ever come back to this wicked world. But it is a beautiful and comforting belief that ever around our heads are hovering angels' wings. The spirit of our dead, —our Guardian Angels, Ophelia, are ever with us, and I want you to learn the prayer to your Guardian Angel; repeat after me:

> Angel of God, my guardian dear,
> To whom His love commits me here,
> Ever this day be at my side,
> To light and guard,
> To rule and guide. Amen.

"Yas, Miss Jennie, I guine ter 'member dat. De preacher on de coast done tell us dat eben God Hissef cumed once in a burnin' bush. Yo ain't fergot de story in de Bible, de one yo read me 'bout Abraham,—how he done took his son fer de sacrifice an' lay him on de woodpile; how he guine ter cut him up, an' den burn him; how de angel cum down from heaben, an' take de sword fum him, an' cut de cords an' sot de son free, den de angel say: 'Dar, Abraham, dars er ole goat tied to er tree,—take dat an' sacrifice!' "

Jennie laughed at Ophelia and patted her on the head.

"Poor child! When I am better I shall teach you to read the Bible, and explain it to you. You have a queer idea of our loving Father and his Holy Word."

"Howsomever, Miss Jennie, Ise powerful feared ob ghosties, an' yo oter see Aunt Sally w'en I tells her 'bout 'em, she say: 'Go on! does yo wanter dribe me 'stracted? But I don't b'l'eve all dat nonsense.'"

"You would not be afraid, Ophelia, if I should come and lay my hand on your head after I am dead, would you? You would know that I was watching over you."

"Oh, Miss Jennie, don't talk so! I don't want yo ter die; but I would try,—God knows I would try,—not to be afeared. But if you didn't speak ter me I mought be nervo's."

Midnight,—the hour of solemn quiet, when nature seems hushed and all is still, when weary mortals seek respite from the world's worries and cares in restful sleep; the hour when the blessed on earth hear in the stillness of the night the Heavenly choir,—and so it sounded for little Jennie. Her gentle spirit heard the voices singing, and there seemed to be a halo around her head, as in a sweet voice she began to sing:

> Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,
> Lead thou me on. . . .

Ophelia awoke with a start.

"What yo want, Miss Jennie?" she asked.

Then she looked upon that beautiful face, and she became frightened. The household was aroused by her cries.

"Oh! cum quick, Miss Jennie done took queer!" she called.

Mammy Sophie had just laid down to rest awhile,—she was very tired after her anxious watching over the little invalid,—the doctor having assured her that Jennie would rest very easy for the remainder of the night.

Alas, how little we mortals know when the Master will call! He was calling that saintly child home. The Death Angel was hovering over that house, with outspread wings, to waft the gentle soul to heaven.

The household was soon gathered about Jennie's bedside. She opened her eyes and smiled upon them all; she stretched out her hand to her guardian, and while her spirit wavered on the borderland, said:

"Do not drink any more, Brother Dick. Be good to Marian and the baby. Prepare to meet me in heaven. Remember that our dear Lord loves you all. Oh! how dark it grows! I cannot see you, Marian. Marian, where are you?"

Marian, prostrated at the foot of the bed, could not answer. Ophelia stood beside the bed: "Ise here, Miss Jennie."

"The light! The light! how beautiful, how bright! I see, I see. Mamma has come for me!"

And falling back, she closed her eyes upon this world, to awake in the great unknown.

Who shall say, or dispute, that the dear mother had not come down from heaven to lead her beloved child home? Before the last rites for the beloved dead could be done,—that is, the placing of the poor body to rest in the bosom of Mother Earth,—Mammy Sophy was sitting alone, a silent mourner. Marian took her baby Phyllis and laid her in Mammy Sophy's lap. "Take care of her, as you have taken care of me until I return." Instructing Becky to look after Mammy Sophy and attend her wants, she left to see all that was left of her dear little sister placed in the last resting place.

After the funeral Marian returned home. "Becky, did you give Mammy Sophy something to eat?"

"No, chile, she won't speak ter me. She jist sit an' rocked de baby an' moaned an' moaned."

Marian went to her Mammy and kissed the old black face.

"I will take baby. Won't you stay and have dinner?"

"No, chile. I don't wants no dinner. Ise guine now."

She left, as if in a dazed condition. It troubled Marian, and it occurred to her how thoughtless of her it had been not to send Henry home with her.

It was midnight, and the bell on the front

gate rang furiously. Colonel Tracy called out:

"Who's there?"

"It is Edmond, sir. Wah's Mammy Sophy? She ain't cum home yit."

The Colonel admitted the old man, who was trembling with fear of he knew not what.

"Mammy Sophy ain't cum home!" he wailed.

A searching party was soon formed, headed by old Edmond, to hunt for the poor old woman; and after a long, discouraging, weary tramp, they were rewarded. Old Edmond was the first to see her.

"Dar she!" he cried; "dar she, laying under dat tree!"

And, sure enough, there she was, lying exhausted from her long tramp. She had removed her shoes, and her feet were all swollen and bleeding. They raised her gently, and placed her in the carriage, but alas! her reason had fled. She kept on crying:

"Hit's a long road, honey; but I'll be dar bimeby."

When they reached home they placed her in her comfortable bed. Marian came to her at once.

"Mammy dear, Mammy dear," she wailed; "what is the matter? Speak to me!" Her mistress's voice seemed to rouse the old woman. She opened her eyes and smiled up at her. "You, honey chile, Ise guine ter ole Missus, your Mar, chile, and Mis' Jennie done show

me der way. But hit's long an' dark, honey, —long an' dark. But I rests now in my Savior's arms. Good-by, chile. Kiss yo ole black Mammy once more."

As Marian kissed her, the Angel of love that knows no color closed those weary eyes, and Mammy Sophy went to meet her old "Mistiss" and all the loved ones that she had so faithfully served, who were waiting for her in the realms above.

The household had settled down to its usual routine. Marian grieved greatly for her little sister, but felt that it would be very selfish to wish her back. It is a brave heart and a true Christian that can say: " 'Tis well! Thy Will be done," when those we love are called away. Ophelia could not be comforted. Mrs. Baynard spent a great deal of her time with Marian, whose cup of sorrow seemed to be full to overflowing.

The Colonel, instead of changing his mode of living, as Jennie had requested, each day grew more indifferent to his young wife and baby. It was a common thing for him to come home night after night under the influence of liquor. But the dying child's words seemed to haunt him, for he would say when his wife would remonstrate with him:

"A short life, and a merry one for me. Be happy to-day, for to-morrow you die."

A strenuous interview had taken place between Mr. Morris's lawyer and Colonel Tracy in regard to Bell's property, and the Colonel feared the result of an investigation.

Marian and Mrs. Baynard were sitting in the bed-chamber one day employed on some fancy work, when Becky announced:

"Dey's a lady in de parlor dat wants ter see Miss Marian."

"Did she give her name?"

"No'm; she jis say you didn't know her nohow, an' she done come on bizness ter see yo."

"Come down with me, Addie. It is probably some book agent."

As the two friends entered the parlor, they saw a tall, slender, pale-faced woman, dressed all in black, standing before the oil painting of the Colonel. So absorbed was she in studying that face that she was not aware of the ladies' presence until she heard Marian say:

"Won't you be seated, madam?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I was admiring that portrait. Your father, no doubt?"

"No, it is my husband's portrait."

"Why, you seem so young to be married. I will not trespass on your time."

"How can I serve you?" asked Marian.

"I am an artist, I paint miniatures on ivory,—it is the only way that I have now of earning my living. It is the same old story: I have known better and happier days. But, forgive

me; I will not burden you, ladies, with my troubles. Our sorrows are our own. For several days I have followed a beautiful child and her black nurse, and I felt that if I could paint that baby's face, my reputation as an artist would be established, and I should not have to go from door to door, as I do now, to solicit work. I saw the nurse and baby enter here, and I dared to venture in. She must be your child?"

"Mamma! Mamma!" called a childish voice.

"Come in, dear."

And little Phyllis ran to her mother's side.

"Oh!" exclaimed the stranger. "That is the child I followed. May I take her on my lap? You won't refuse a lonely woman that pleasure?"

"Certainly not. Go to the lady, Baby." Little Phyllis rather liked the stranger; she kissed her again and again, saying in her childish voice:

"Nice lady, pitty lady. I 'ove 'ou."

Meanwhile Marian and Mrs. Baynard were discussing the question of giving the order for Baby's picture. "It is a good charity. I will do all I can to help her. She seems to be such a lady; it is too bad that she is so unfortunate."

"Yes; you have only to look into her face to see that she has known suffering. I shall get her all the orders that I can."

Marian turned toward the stranger to arrange about the sittings, and to have the pic-

ture commenced as soon as possible. To her astonishment she saw the baby tightly clasped in the woman's arms, while the baby hands were trying to wipe away the fast-falling tears. Marian expressed deep sympathy for her.

"Oh, it is nothing, I assure you. Please don't distress yourself about me. I should like to come here, as I live so far away."

"That would be agreeable. When shall I expect you?"

"Day after to-morrow. Until then, good-by."

And, kissing the baby, the visitor left the house.

"Who was that woman closely veiled that just went out? She seemed familiar," asked her husband, entering.

"No; you don't know her, Richard," answered his wife. "She is a stranger to me. In fact she has forgotten to give me her name or address. But, never mind; she will be here day after to-morrow. She is a miniature artist. I have given her an order to paint Baby's picture. She seemed to be a lady, and has had some great sorrow. I feel deeply for her."

"Well, I would not be annoyed with every one who has a story to tell. You are very gullible, Marian, and you want to be very careful."

Marian looked the contempt she felt, and left the room.

"I wonder who that woman could be. Seems

to me that I have seen her before somewhere. My God! No; it can't be. It is a coincidence that she should resemble Estelle. Bah, my brain is getting foggy,—I imagine strange things. Phantoms seem to rise up before me. I should feel more comfortable were it not for her ghost. It is not the dead I fear so much, but the living. Well, old man, brace up; you need a cocktail to steady your nerves. Metaphorically speaking, I would like to slap myself on the back and say: 'Brace up, old man, you are all right! Brace up.'"

CHAPTER XV

THE COLONEL'S VISIT

Colonel Tracy sat alone in his library the evening after the miniature artist had called at his home.

"So she is going to have a miniature of the baby, is she? Well, I wonder she wouldn't like one of myself, too, to wear around her neck. That is usually what a loving wife wants,—to carry a picture of her dear husband next to her heart, so she may take it out and gaze on her darling when away. Ha, ha! that would be a joke on me; my wife can't endure the original around, much less a miniature. I'll wager, though, that poor Estelle is never without my picture. Oh, yes; I remember I gave her a locket once, with my picture in it. I can see the dear girl now just as she looked when I clasped the chain around her neck. Heighoh! this is a queer world! What a fiasco this marriage has been! No use crying over spilled milk,—but, really, I do feel sorry for Marian. Now that's magnanimous, I must say. Tracy, old boy, you are improving. It would do me a lot of good to be coddled and petted to-night. I feel so lonely and heartsick.

"It's an old saying, and I fear that I believe it fully,—'coming events cast their shadows before.' I don't know why it is, but I feel so unhappy to-night; I feel as if some impending danger threatened me. I must get out of this house for a while, before I go crazy for good."

The Colonel laid aside the book that he had been trying to read. It was the "Life of Cleopatra," with a page turned down at the death of Antony. He rang for Henry.

"Tell your Mistress that if she should need me, I shall be at the Pickwick Club. Do you hear,—Pickwick Club? It's as well to let her know where I can be found. But she won't need me," he chuckled to himself.

It was his intention, as he had told Henry, to go to the club. The cabman evidently did not understand, or the address given to him was very different from the one he had told to the old servant, for the cab rattled on past the gayly lighted clubhouse on Canal Street, and, as a darky would say, did not even hesitate much less stop at the door. On they went until they reached the well-known house on Bienville Street.

Tracy was much amused and gratified at the look of pleasure and surprise in Estelle's face as he entered her home.

"Dick, my darling! Why am I so blessed to-night?"

"You may call it blessed, little woman, but,

hang me! if it don't beat me, how a man can be a blessing to one woman and a curse to another; how one calls him a hero and puts him on a pedestal and worships him as you do me, Estelle, and his wife only sees his feet of clay." The Colonel was very much pleased with himself.

"I tell you, girl," he went on, "it brings out all the devil in a man when his wife looks at him as if she would like to sprinkle holy water on him before he could approach her. Damned if I like it!"

Estelle did not answer; she knew full well that while he might find fault with his wife, he would not permit it from any one else.

"How goes it with you?" he asked, as he placed his arm about her waist and drew her toward him. "Get on your things. We will dine at Moreau's to-night, for old time's sake."

Moreau's was one of the famous old French restaurants of New Orleans. The bill of fare there would tempt the appetite of any connoisseur.

As the Colonel and Estelle entered and took their seats at the table allotted them, several men enjoying their dinner looked askance at Tracy, and one said:

"Who is the fair dame with the Colonel? Not his wife, I'll wager."

"No, it is one of those 'in our hour of ease' kind."

"You don't say," returned the other man.

The Colonel had heard the remarks, but he pretended that he had not.

"Well, old sweetheart, what shall it be?" he said, looking over the bill of fare. "For old time's sake, make it a cold bottle and 'a hot bird.'"

"That will be very nice, Dick. Let it be as you say."

After dinner they started for home, where, on their return, Virginia had the fire burning brightly in the open grate; the Colonel's decanter and glasses were on the table, and during their absence she had slipped out and purchased a box of the Colonel's favorite brand of cigars.

"Well, Virginia," he said, chucking her under the chin, "this is what I call comfort."

"Yas, Marse Dick. Shall I take off yo shoes an' put on yo slippers?"

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "You are damned cute. No; I can't stay to-night; I must be going soon. It is getting late."

"Well, good-night, Marse Dick. If yo wants me, jist ring."

After the negro had left the room he looked questioningly into Estelle's face. "Hang it, girl," he burst out at length, "you seem depressed. You were not your old bright, cheery self at dinner. Come here to your old place" —extending his open arms toward her—"let

me comfort you. We both seem to feel the influence of the coming of some calamity. I cannot shake it off."

She gave way to one sweet moment of ecstasy, throwing herself into the arms of the one—and only one—she had ever loved on earth. She felt it would be sweet to die clasped in his arms, as she lay there and yielded herself to the overmastering joy of his kisses on her lips. Then she withdrew from his embrace, and left the room.

Tracy helped himself to a drink of the old cognac, and sat soliloquizing.

"It's strange how things shape themselves in this life. Well, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. But I'll be everlasting damned if all the evil don't come to me at once. My wife hates me, Estelle shrinks from me, and my business is going to the dogs! Why not end it all? No use kicking against fate. A little cold lead would finish it all." Then he called aloud: "Estelle, Estelle! Do you intend that I shall spend the evening alone? It is late; I must be off."

"I am coming," she answered. She came in quietly and stood behind his chair, wishing to hide her tear-stained cheeks and swollen eyes. She placed her arms about his neck and kissed his hair.

"Oh, we have been so happy in the past," she murmured.

"Yes; and we shall be in the future. My wife does not love me, and you do. Let the law free her; I shall give her ample cause. We will take up our old life together, Estelle."

"That can never be. I never felt as I do now. I must not, will not, see you again."

"Why, who has come between us? You are all that is left to me, Estelle. I cannot have any one take my place. I would kill the one that separated us."

"There will never be another. But I repent my past and the sins I have committed for the love of you, and sealed it with——"

She broke off abruptly.

"Well, go on," he said impatiently. "Sealed it with what?"

"Your baby's kiss upon my lips; and her little hands wiped my tears away. I shall now seek forgiveness of my God, and try and make amends for the past."

The Colonel gazed at her as one bereft of reason.

"My child? My child kissed your lips and wiped your tears away? Where, woman, could you have seen my child?"

"I am the miniature painter who has an order to paint your baby's picture."

"Viper!" he hissed, "could you not respect the sacredness of my home? So you were the woman I saw coming out of my house. Your figure struck me as being familiar. You are

the woman that aroused my wife's sympathy, —she was so sorry for you; she and her friend are so anxious to help you, ha, ha!" he laughed loudly; "had she but known, she would have had her servants throw you out. How dare you take such a liberty!"

"Oh, be merciful!" cried Estelle; "be merciful!"

And she cast herself at his feet. He spurned her as if she were a leper in his path, pushed past her and descended the stairs to the street.

"Who can understand a woman?" he asked himself. "Well, this ends it all. I might have known that she would play me false, but I shall put a stop to that miniature business, or any more of her fool capers. It is too bad she has spoiled all our future good times; there was much in common between us. She understood me. As she said, we have been very happy in the past; yes, past it must be now. I owe it to my wife." Thus he muttered to himself as he walked along the dark street.

CHAPTER XVI

A MURDER AND A SUICIDE

"Are you sure, Mac, that he will come this way?"

"Well, I went up to the house, and the servant said that he had gone to the Pickwick Club. That I thought an excuse, so I chanced it to come here, as I have seen him come out of that house on Bienville Street before. I lay in wait, and saw the yellow girl from there go to the cigar store on the corner and get a box of cigars; I sauntered into the store after she had left, and in an offhand way said to the proprietor: 'Who is that yellow girl?' The old man was rather garrulous, and was nothing loath to have a chat.

" 'Oh, she,' he said,—'the one that just went out? She's a maid to a lady in Bienville Street. Her sweetheart must have returned to his old love, for she has not been in here for months; yes, it must be over a year.'

" 'How do you know it's her old sweetheart?' I asked.

" 'Because the girl said: "De Colonel's kind, like he used to git." Then I naturally

questioned her. "Oh, say now. I thought that was all off long ago; I heard that the Colonel had married some time ago and settled down." It would have done you good to have heard that wench laugh. "Har! ha, Mister John. Yo certainly do 'muse me! De Colonel could no mo' gin up my missus den de bees kin he'p sipping de honey fum de flowers. No, suh. Wat he care fer dat gal wife? He an' Miss Estelle wa' fr'en's long afore he married. Yas, he did stay away a powerful long time, dat's er fact, but Miss Estelle say 'he will cum back to me, Virginia, when he gits tired o' his young wife.' She say to me: 'Dis, Virginia, is a union ob hearts. I shall try to be happy until he cums.' I don't reckon she guine to be like Lot's wife,—a-looking back ter see what guine ter happen. She an' de Colonel done gone out ter dinner. I must hurry home an' git de fire burning bright fo' dem w'en dey gits home." "Say, what's your madam's name? You have never told me." "Miss Estelle," she said. "I mean her last name," I said. "What yo wants ter know fer? Does yo want ter send her er invite to King Comus's ball at de Op'ra house?" "No, but I would like to know." "Well," she retorted, "yo knows too much now fo yo health." And with that she left the store.' "

" 'Have you ever seen the woman?' " I asked.

" 'Oh, yes, a number of times. She is a very pretty and unobtrusive little woman, lives a

very quiet life, does not mix with her neighbors, and looks like a woman that has seen great sorrow,—a woman, I should judge, much more sinned against than sinning.' That," said Mac to his friend Watkins, "is the story I have learned to-night. Colonel Tracy is there, and I shall wait for him. Watkins, are you game? I mean no harm, if I can prevent it. I am here to settle old scores, and I won't answer for consequences, let the outcome be what it may."

"I'll stand by you, Mac; go ahead."

As he finished speaking a man staggered toward them, talking aloud. The hour was late, the street was deserted. McCall exclaimed:

"It is he!" And he placed himself in the Colonel's path.

"What do you mean, sir, to obstruct my way?" cried Tracy, as he raised his loaded cane and aimed a blow at his antagonist. With that they clinched. The struggle was brief, and the Colonel fell to the sidewalk.

Watkins watched the street. From the old courtyard door he saw a woman clad in deep black approaching.

"In here!" he called to Mac. "Out of sight; quick!"

The woman hurried by. She did not see the prostrate form on the sidewalk.

"My God!" exclaimed McCall. "That face! Follow her; don't lose sight of her until you

know where she lives. I will go to our room. Come and report to me there."

Captain Watkins hastened after the fast receding figure. In a darkened room sat McCall until his friend joined him.

"Well," reported Watkins; "I followed her, and found out that she lives at No. —— Bienville Street. No doubt she is Colonel Tracy's mistress. Poor woman; she did not see her lover lying on the sidewalk as she passed. I hope he is not badly hurt, for her sake, if nothing more."

"Choke those words in your throat, man! Hurt? I hope he is dead,—and for her sake. If he is not, may my right hand rot from my arm, if I've failed to kill him."

"What is the matter with you, Mac? Calm yourself, man. Are you insane? What is that woman to you that you should avenge her wrongs?"

"My God, Watkins, Madame Estelle is my long-lost sister, whom we mourned as dead. I saw her face as she passed,—that is why I asked you to follow her. I could not, but now I shall go to her at once."

"No, no, Mac; if you value your life, do not venture out to-night. You must not be seen on the streets. Wait until morning, and I will go with you."

The night rolled on. The two men sat in silence and smoked. Not a word had passed

between them for some time. A loud cry arose from the street; it was the newsboys calling out their morning papers.

"The papers,—the papers! Watkins, get them, man, and let us know the worst."

"Here you are, *Picayune, Times Democrat!* Full account of the murder and suicide!"

"My God!" gasped McCall. "Will Watkins never return?"

"Here you are, Mac. Here are the papers. Brace up, old man."

"Read," said McCall; "I cannot."

"'Murder. A prominent citizen was murdered last night, or at an early hour this morning. No clew. Supposed to be the work of the "Vendetta," as it is the second affair of the kind in the last few months. A party of revelers from the French Ball were returning home; two of the young ladies for a lark ran away from their friends; as they turned the corner of Bienville Street they fell over the prostrate form of a man. Thinking it was a drunken man, they scrambled to their feet, and found that their clothes and hands were covered with blood. Shriek upon shriek rent the air. The police were soon at the spot. It was not a case of robbery; the man's money was still on his person. On searching the pockets of the body, an envelope was found with the name Colonel Richard Tracy, No. —— St.

Charles Avenue. The body was sent to that address.' "

"Thank God, thank God; and by my hand!" said McCall. "But the suicide—the suicide, man; read on; who was that?"

" 'Suicide. There was a hurried call from No. —— Bienville Street early this morning. A woman, living alone with her maid, had committed suicide by drinking poison. Nothing could be learned from the maid. She admitted that her mistress had quarreled with her lover, and she did not see her mistress until she went into her room, at five o'clock the next morning with her coffee, and found her dead. Nothing could make the girl tell the name of her mistress's lover. She did admit on cross examination that her mistress knew Colonel Tracy. All further information was gathered from the man at the cigar store on the corner. He said he knew that the Colonel was at Madame Estelle's the night before the murder.

" 'The death of Colonel Tracy will probably always remain a mystery. Whether it was the vengeance of an outraged woman, or the curse of the "Vendetta," will never be known. The police have no clew whatever to work on.' "

Dr. Stone was at Marian's side when all that was mortal of Colonel Tracy was brought home.

"Alas! my poor misguided friend," said the

old doctor as he looked into that dead face. "As you live so shall you die."

McCall and Captain Watkins went to the home of Estelle. They had no fear that they would be suspected of the murder. When they reached her apartments they raised the old brass knocker and knocked gently. The mulatto girl Virginia opened the door.

"Yo can't cum in. De police say no one allowed in here."

McCall slipped a dollar into her hand, saying:

"We have been sent here. We know Madame Estelle."

The girl opened the door just enough to admit them. McCall approached the table on which the body lay. He drew back the sheet gently that covered the poor dead face. How tranquil and peaceful she looked in the embrace of death! No trace was left upon that cold white face of her sad, unhappy life. Virginia had placed upon Estelle's breast the flowers that Colonel Tracy had brought the night before.

"My God!" said McCall, as he put his hand upon the cold, dead face. "Poor little sister, I have avenged your death." Captain Watkins touched him on the shoulder.

"Come, Mac; go to your room; leave everything to me. I will take charge of the funeral," he said.

Estelle and the Colonel were laid to rest the

next day; and who shall say, as they stand before their Maker at the Great Tribunal, how they will be judged? For with Him,—a just and loving God, a Father forgiving of the sins of His children,—it is not a question of sex but of souls.

Requiescat in pace!

CHAPTER XVII

LAWYER HORTON

Mrs. Baynard came to offer her sympathy and do whatever she could to help her friend.

"Marian, forgive me if I appear inquisitive,—I don't mean to pry into your affairs; but my love for you makes me anxious as to your future. Will was saying at dinner last night he feared that the Colonel had left things in very bad shape."

"I hardly know the worst just yet myself. Lawyer Horton was engaged by Bell to look after her interest, and he has also taken up my affairs, so I shall soon know how matters stand."

"Do let me take Baby Phyllis and Ophelia home with me for a few days, until you are feeling better?"

"I wish you would, dear,—if you are quite sure it will not annoy you to have them with you. It would be a great relief to me, and I should appreciate it very much."

Marian gave orders to Becky to have the children ready to accompany Mrs. Baynard. Becky soon returned with Baby Phyllis and Ophelia, all dressed and ready for departure.

"Had not Becky better go with you, Addie, as far as your home? I fear the children will be too much trouble."

"Not a bit," laughed her friend. "I feel now, for once in my life, that I can be of some help to you, Marian. Trust me to take good care of Baby."

Lawyer Horton called that evening. Marian did not keep him waiting very long. She looked very frail and sweet in her deep mourning robes; and it was a hard task for Lawyer Horton to tell that young widow that she was left comparatively destitute. But, like all brave men, he felt a disagreeable task must not be delayed,—it would be best for him to tell Mrs. Tracy the worst at once, and then prepare to help her in every way in his power and with all his knowledge as a lawyer. So he came to the point at once.

"We lawyers have the reputation of not having much heart, Mrs. Tracy; but let me say to you that I am heartily sorry for the complicated condition your affairs are in. I have looked over the Colonel's books and papers, and find that they are in bad shape. Your sister Bell has one of the Magazine Street houses, which she wants sold; the other house was left to your child by your sister Jennie; but both are mortgaged up to the last slate on the roof. That leaves you without anything."

"Oh, no," said Marian, "I have this prop-

erty,—the home my Father and Mother died in. Surely this is mine?"

"Poor little woman, I fear that you are laboring under a fearful mistake. I have here a copy of a mortgage given to that scoundrel Moss; your signature is affixed."

"There surely must be some mistake. I did sign a paper for Lawyer Moss, but Colonel Tracy said it was to save the Magazine Street property for my sisters, when he had trouble with his partners, so they could not attach that. He was in the wrecking business at the time."

"You may well say 'wrecking business,' my dear lady. He was wrecking your fortune with a high hand. What was the name of the partnership?"

"Watkins, McCall, Scott & Co."

"Colonel Tracy was the 'company.'"

"Yes, yes. That man Scott, as I learned, was not a bad sort. He left the others and went into some other business,—cut loose, as it were. The mortgage on this home is long overdue, and there has been no interest paid. Moss has given notice of foreclosure; no doubt I can make some arrangement with him to hold off for a while, until you are ready to vacate, as it will have to be sold. You have a small property on Leontine Street, which, I think, is clear,—a cottage and quite a large lot of ground. You know the place, I presume."

Marian nodded her head. She was too overcome to speak. The lawyer hurried on:

"Pardon me; but you will not require all this beautiful furniture, the pictures, and bric-a-brac in your new home. I would advise your selling it,—all but what you absolutely need,—and retain only the simplest of your effects. It will help out your exchequer and tide you over your present difficulties."

"I am to give up this house, sell all my mother's things, and go away? Oh, no; you cannot mean it! Tell me that you have made a mistake; that there is some way to save my home."

"Would that I could, but I cannot. All that I tell you is true,—only too true."

"I am beggared, beggared to that extent! Oh, dear God, what shall I do?"

Marian was pale to the lips; every vestige of color had forsaken her face.

"Compose yourself, my dear Madam; there will be plenty of time; and I will see you again in a day or two. Keep up a brave heart."

"What has to be done, Lawyer Horton, must be done at once. I cannot remain under this roof; it is no longer mine. There is no use to prolong the agony. I will not fail you. You do your part, and I will do mine."

Her voice seemed strange, even to herself. She had awakened from a girl to a woman of action. Lawyer Horton bowed himself out; he

felt that Marian could fight the battle best alone.

She sat utterly crushed.

"Ruined! ruined!" she murmured; "I must leave my home; and I am penniless."

Becky came in quietly and stood by her side.

"I heard w'at dat lawyer man done say, chile; but, honey, don't you worry. Here's a little money fer yo. Dat'll he'p yo some. It's yours. Don't look at me so wild-eyed, honey; ebery cent is yours. Ise been er sabin fer yo all dis time, hid down in de bottom ob my trunk. Henry know all about it."

And she extended both hands towards her mistress.

"Becky, what does this mean? The Colonel's watch and chain and that money. What does it mean?"

"Dat's bery easy ter splain, chile. Yo would not empty de Colonel's pockets dat night, like I wanted yo to do, so I jist done it myse'f. I knowed dat yo guine ter need it some day; so I was de robber. Mussey, w'at a fuss he did make w'en he found dem gone! I had ter pry open de shutter an' break de bolt, case I didn't want any 'spicions ter fall on de servants; dey mought er thought dat it was my pore ole Henry."

Marian kissed her nurse's cheek, saying:

"I understand, Becky dear; you did it for the love of me."

Mrs. Baynard, who came to report about the

baby, thought it best to show a cheerful face and amuse Marian, if possible.

"We are having the time of our lives," she laughed. "That husband of mine is a regular clown for the baby, and he makes the poor little darky sing and dance jubber for him every night. Ophelia feels the whole responsibility of the baby; she insists on a mattress being put on the floor for her beside the baby's bed. Will, to tease her, said: 'You need not mind, Ophelia, I am going to sleep with the baby.' 'Den I hab to sleep wid you,' she answered, 'case I done promised Miss Marian I guine ter sleep wid de baby.' You may be sure that Ophelia had her way.

"I heard the baby fretting last night, and I looked in to see what was the matter. There stood Ophelia. She had the baby stripped, and was rubbing her chest with grease, the poor baby protesting vigorously. 'What are you doing to that child?' I asked.

" 'De baby got er cold, an' I kan't find no goose grease, so I done took de stuff w'at yo grease yo face wid, Miss Addie.' "

Marian was paying scarcely any attention to the prattle of her friend. She interrupted her, saying:

"I shall have to leave this home soon. Could Will find any place for my Henry? I shall give up all my servants but Becky and Ophelia, and I would like to find a good home for Sally."

Her friend understood only too well the situation and would not probe the wounded heart too deep by asking needless questions.

"I should like Sally, if you are going to part with her. Mahaly leaves me soon, and I shall need a cook. Come, we will go to the kitchen and talk with Sally."

Entering the kitchen, they found Sally humming to herself as she went about her work. She looked surprised when she saw the ladies; but she dusted two of the wooden chairs vigorously with her blue check apron and offered them a seat.

"Sally, I am going to give up my home; and I want to find a good home for you. I shall not need you any more," Marian began.

"Guine ter gin up de house? W'at's dat ter me? I don't go wid de house; I goes wah yo goes, Miss Marian, waheber dat be. But, O Lord, habe massy on me, yo done say you ain't guine ter need me any mo! Did I eber 'spect de day guine ter cum w'en yo guine ter say yo don't need old Sally."

And she threw her apron over her head and rocked and cried, as if her heart would break. Marian thought it would be a hopeless task to try and make her understand, but she at length persuaded Sally to listen.

"Sally," she explained, "Mrs. Baynard wants you. Colonel Tracy has left me very

poor, and I cannot pay you. Mrs. Baynard can, and will give you a good home."

"I ain't got no objections to Mrs. Baynard, if I must go; but I can't stay in de same house wid dat no-'count Mahaly. I tries ter be a Christian, but I kan't love dat Mahaly."

"Sally," said Addie, "if that is all that troubles you, I know you will come to me, for Mahaly is leaving in a day or two, and I shall expect you to take her place."

As the ladies turned to leave the kitchen Sally grasped Marian's hands and covered them with kisses.

"Honey, I knows now why yo say yo don't need old Sally. Forgib me; you has more dan yo kin bare now, but recomember dat w'en yo do need Sally, she will come to yo, no matter whar yo be."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AUCTION

"MARIAN, you have not told me where your new home is to be."

A smile flittered across Marian's face as Addie made the inquiry.

"On Leontine Street."

At the answer Addie dropped into the nearest chair.

"Have you more than one house on Leontine Street, dear?"

"No, only one,—a nice little cottage hid in a bower of roses."

"Marian, you are joking. You surely don't mean the little cottage where you and I went to see the poor sick woman, whose husband had a vegetable garden in the rear?"

"The same. They have vacated for your poverty-stricken friend, Marian Tracy. A nice little place,—so handy!—all on one floor. I shan't require so many servants. Easy for me to do the chamberwork, while Becky cooks and does the washing and ironing; quite healthy up there away from the noise of the city; it will be nice for Phyllis and Ophelia."

She laughed hysterically. It had struck her as so absurd that she, heretofore the petted child of fortune, should have to work, sheltered in that humble home. At the sound of that laughter Addie thought Marian had suddenly gone mad with all her trouble; but she soon recovered herself and said:

"By the way, Addie; you must attend the auction sale, Monday week. All this"—motioning with her hand—"goes under the hammer. You may be able to get things that you have always wanted cheap."

Addie burst into tears.

"Do I deserve that, Marian?"

"No, no, dear friend; I am heartless to wound you. My own sorrow has made me unjust. Forgive and forget, dear."

The red flag was placed on the gate-post the following Monday; a darky with his drum marched up and down in front of No. — St. Charles Avenue calling the would-be buyers and the curious to the sale. The great house was thrown open to the motley crowd. Many had longed to enter there, but had no right nor excuse for so doing; but poverty, that cruel master, threw wide the portals of that stately home.

The auctioneer was calling in a loud voice:

"Ladies and gentlemen! give me a bid on this work of an old master. What did I hear? Absurd; can't give it away. It's a Rubens. I

would not insult you ladies and gentlemen by saying that you were not capable of appreciating the contents of this house. I am sure you are artistic and know the value of the things I am offering you, so we won't start out to play tag but come down to business at once. Now here you are: What am I bid? Better go it again."

While this was going on the curious were wandering from room to room handling with rude fingers articles that Marian had held sacred, as they had been her mother's. Unkind remarks were heard from the vulgar crowd. But at last it was all over, and the few things Marian had reserved for her own use were sent to the little home on Leontine Street.

In a few days she was settled in her new home. Becky had done everything to make it as attractive as possible for her young mistress. The family portraits were hung upon the parlor wall, covering a great many defects. The piano was placed in one corner, with the music rack near at hand. Marian had not the heart to lift the lid of her old piano; it stood there unused,—a mute reminder of better days now gone.

Henry would not leave his old wife Becky, so it was arranged that he should take charge of the garden. He kept the little family supplied with fresh vegetables and sold to the neighbors what remained. It was a sweet little

home, with the flowers blooming all around it. Magnolia, orange, and fig trees lined the walks and made a delightful shade from the summer sun. The flower garden was Henry's special pride; he would always gather a few fresh flowers for Becky to place on "Miss Marian's" breakfast table.

Little Phyllis had now grown to be quite a large child. Ophelia was her constant companion and took entire charge of her; as she would assure Marian:

"Didn't I hab ter do eberything fer de baby wen we was at Miss Addie's? I like ter know now how she gwine ter git erlong widout me."

The child's query was unanswerable, as little Phyllis was as fond of her black playmate as she was of the child.

Marian was taken very ill soon after her change of home, and did not seem to gain in strength or courage for her battle with the world. The blow that had come upon her had for a time made her oblivious of those around her. Old Henry had hung the hammock under the shelter of the big fig trees, and as Marian would lie out there in the soft, balmy air by the hour, her heart would ache with such a pain that life seemed hardly worth the battle. She would call her faithful friend Becky to come and sit beside her and tell her over and over again of her Father and Mother and the old home days before the war. The color would mount to

her cheek as Becky would relate one incident after another of the good old times. The old bright light would come into those dark, dreamy eyes. The mocking bird singing in the trees and the flowers casting their sweetness upon the air, made life seem very sweet to one so young.

"Becky, what a just and loving God to shower His heavenly love upon us, the just and the unjust! The beautiful world is for all. Why should I worry?"

"You must not worry, chile. All will cum right some day. Trust Him; dat's all."

"That recalls a verse from the German, Becky, that comforts me. It is:

> Stilled now be every anxious care,
> See God's great goodness everywhere;
> Leave all to Him in perfect rest,
> He will do all things for the best."

"That's so, chile; 'tain't fer us to question His dealings wid us. Just trest in de Lord." Becky looked up, but Marian was sweetly sleeping. "Pore chile; how little ye Par an' Mar thought dere chile would suffer so! I mustn't think erbout it, case it makes it all de harder to b'ar. I must keep a brave heart fer Mis' Marian's sake. I got ter keep her courage up, case she got all she kin stand. Sleep, sleep on, dear chile; an' may yo dreams be brighter dan when yo's awake."

While Marian slept Becky sat and sewed for

Baby Phyllis. She looked at the little dress with great pleasure.

"Good thing ole Missus made me l'arn to sew w'en I did so hate ter; but little did she know dat I would hab to sew for Mis' Marian an' de baby. Well, I must go an' start de dinner now."

And Becky crept quietly away, leaving Marian in sweet slumber in the hammock.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FORTUNE TELLER

"HERE'S Aunt Addie!" joyously shouted little Phyllis.

"Fer de saints,—Aunt Sally, too," said Ophelia.

Marian awoke from her slumber to see her friend and her old servant coming up the walk. She arose to meet them.

"Here we are, Marian; we've come to spend the day."

Sally followed the speaker, a basket on her arm. She went toward Marian with outstretched hand, and grasped the slim white fingers.

"How is yo feelin' dese bright an' lobely days?" she asked. " 'Pears to me, Miss Marian, dat yo ain't as spry as yo orter be, nohow. I jes tell Miss Addie I don't reckon dat yo gits de proper nerishment. I kinder hinted ter Miss Addie dat yo mought like de taste ob some ob my vittals."

"And I took the hint," laughed Mrs. Baynard. "So here we are! It is not a pound party, my dear; but I thought I would bring

something to try and tempt your appetite. I thought it a wise suggestion on Sally's part that she come and get the lunch, and give Becky some hints on cooking; for she is not the cook Sally is, and I guess you realize the fact by this time. Every member of my family is away for the day, and I know of no better way of passing the time than to come up to see you."

Sally had taken her basket, and gone to the kitchen, where Becky met her with pleasure.

" 'Deed Ise glad ter see yo, Sister Sally," was her greeting.

These two were glad to have the opportunity to talk over old times together.

"Now, Becky, sit yosef down, an' gin me dis kitchen. Ise gwine ter make de pots an' pans fly. No; yo can't he'p me no way. Yo jest sit an' talk."

"Sally, Ise so narvious. Miss Marian wanter talk all de time 'bout her Par an' Mar; I don't like it. It ain't no good sign. De oder night I thought I see old Miss standin' by Miss Marian's bed. I didn't tell her, case Ise feared to scar' her."

"Now, Becky, yo sertainly do pester me w'en yo talk so. Yo know ole Mistiss kain't cum back to dis sinful world,—she's a shining light up above. How yo reckon she could be happy if she know all de trouble Miss Marian habe? Yo know yo don't believe in no sich things yosef. Now, if yo cum to talk hoodoo, Ise got some

knowledge on dat p'int, case ain't I done see Mahaly crawling on her han's an' knees; de doctor calls it rheumistis, but I tells yo she's hoodoo. Some one done cast er spell on her, sure as yo born."

"Sally, yo didn't useter like Mahaly yosef so powerful much, did yo?"

"Well, dat's narther here or dar," said Sally, as she took a peep in the oven to see how her cake was coming on.

"Dat smells desirious," said Becky; "an' Ise got de table all sot."

"I wants ter ax a favor ob yo, Becky. Yo know we kain't none ob us tell w'en we gwine ter be called away."

"I will do all I can fer yo, Sister Sally."

"Well, yo recomember dat silk quilt dat I sot so much store by. I made it outen ole Missus's silk dresses, an' wen she die, I put er piece ob black ribbon all round de pieces dat was her'n; den wen Miss Marian got big ernough to ware silk dresses, I commenced on dat quilt ag'in. Dat ah quilt am a story in itself. An' wen I gits lonesome fer de good ole times I spreads dat quilt on my lap an' study. I kin see po ole Miss in dis hyar dress, and dat'ar dress. How prowd Master used to be ob her! Well, no one could hold a candle to her an' dat's er fact. I done shed many an' many er tear on dat quilt, an' wen I is dead, I wants yo to wrap

it 'round me in my coffin. I could not leabe it behin', no way or nuther."

"If de good Lord spars me, Sister Sally, I sure will do like yo axes me. I hope I be spared to take care ob Miss Marian,—pore chile. She don't hab no idea ob money."

"An' how she gwine ter? Miss Marian ain't no pore white trash. How kin she cum down to dis pinchin' an' squeezin' ebery cent to see if she kain't git more outen it dan it calls fer? Don't bodder her erbout money, Becky; I saves all my wages; an' wen Mr. Baynard gins er dinner party, he always sends me out five dollars fer er present. I pays all my dues at de 'ciety, an' dey will hab ter take care ob me wen I am sick, an' lay me 'way wen I dies. So, yo see I kin spar some money wen Miss Marian wants it; an' nobody needs ter know, 'cept yo an' me."

"Miss Marian would neber hear ob dat, Sally."

"How she gwine ter hear,—'les' yo tells her? An' I ain't gwine ter gin yo my permission ter open yo ole black mouf."

"Dere, dere, Sally, don't git mad, don't less us quarrel. I won't tell. An' if Miss Marian needs money, Ise gwine ter cum ter yo."

"Now yo is talkin' sense, Becky. How many, many years ole Marster an' ole Missus done took care ob us! An' as long as I kin use dese ole hands, dat chile shan't suffer. Dar now;

yo go call de ladies. Lunch is all ready to put on de table."

Marian and her friend made merry over the feast,—for feast it was indeed to Marian. Sally peeped in at the door to watch her young "Mistess" (as she always insisted upon calling her). It made her old heart rejoice to see Marian doing full justice to the fried chicken, with the gravy and the brown biscuits, and the other dainty dishes that the old cook had made to tempt her appetite. When coffee and dessert were served, Marian said:

"I must call a halt, Addie; I have not eaten so much in months."

"Ha! ha! Thank de good Lord!" laughed Sally. "I knowed I could 'tempt yo, chile."

"Thanks, Sally. Your lunch was a success; it was like the good old times."

"Oh, hush, chile; yo hurts me wen yo talks dat'er way."

And Sally turned to hide the tears in her eyes. The ladies were about to leave the dining-room when Becky said:

"Miss Marian, ole Marthy, one ob yo Mar's ole plantation niggers, is out in de kitchen. She wants ter cum in an' say 'howdy.' "

"Let her come in, Becky," said Marian.

And when the old negress appeared in the doorway,—a gay bandanna handkerchief on her head and a yellow worsted shawl about her

shoulders,—bowing and curtseying to the ladies, she welcomed her with:

"Come in, Marthy. How are you?"

"Ise spared, thank God. Chile, how's yo feelin'?"

"What are you doing for a living now? You seem too old to work hard."

"Ise pretty ole, chile; dat's er fact. I disremember jes how ole I is; but I must be nigh onter a hundred. Oh, yes; scuse me, Miss Marian; yo done axe me w'at I do fer er libin'? I tells fortunes by de kyards. I got all I kin do: case de young gals wants ter know erbout dere sweethearts, an' de married ladies wants ter know if dey husbands is true ter dem. I does er heap ob good in dat way in disher world. Let me tell your fortune, Miss Addie?"

"No; tell Miss Marian's. I am curious to know what you will tell her. You can come to my house, Marthy, any time."

Becky had cleared the table, and they seated themselves. The old woman took from her pocket a pack of cards and shuffled and shuffled the greasy pack; then she told Marian to cut and make her wish. Old Marthy arranged the cards in three rows before her, and putting on a very solemn face, said:

"Yo ain't gwine ter be pore all de time; yo gwine ter ride in er fine carriage, an' hab a big gran' house, full ob sarvents. Yo gwine ter hab money on top o' money; yo won't hab ter do

nuthin but sit an' rock yosef all day, an hab er nigger stan' behind yo chair an' fan yo. Yo gwine ter be dressed in silks an' satins an' velvets an' be a gran' lady," croaked the crone.

"This is getting very interesting," said Marian.

"How is she going to get all this, Marthy,—win a capital prize in the Louisiana Lottery?"

"No, no; indeed she ain't. She gwine ter marry er blond man, wid blue eyes an' light hair. An' he gwine ter lobe her er heap, an' be true till he dead."

"I hope it may all come true, Marthy. You deserve your lunch after telling that good fortune. Go out and tell Becky to give you some lunch."

"Be sure and come to my house to-morrow," called Mrs. Baynard, as the old darky left the room.

"Oh, I don't believe in those cards. Poor old soul; if she can earn her living that way, I don't blame her. You know it's an old saying, Addie: 'There is a fool born every minute.'"

"I don't doubt that for a moment," laughed Mrs. Baynard. "I shall be one of them; for I am just as curious as can be to have her tell my fortune to-morrow, and I am sure that Mamma will be too. But, Marian, would it not be strange if, after all, you and Sidney Harrison should become man and wife; for he loved

you very dearly, and I think you rather liked him."

"Well, that will never be. In the first place, he does not answer Marthy's description,—he is not a blond; then, it may surprise you to learn that he can live without me. And I am glad that it is so."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked her friend.

"You remember our friend Marie Nash?"

"Yes; what of her?"

"Well, she was kind enough to send me a Louisville paper, not long ago, with the full account of Sidney Harrison's wedding to a great belle,—Miss Martin of New York. Marie wrote that she was a dear, sweet little thing; and that the wedding was the affair of the winter. The bride is an heiress. Nice of Marie to take the trouble to write me, when I have not written to her since my marriage. Was it not?"

"Oh, I suppose so; but I always thought her such a cat. She did it, I am sure, just to wound you; and I resent it, coming just at this time, when you are in so much trouble."

"Never mind, dear friend; if I had cared, it might have been different; and if Marie meant to be vicious she would be disappointed if she knew how I felt. I shall write her at once and thank her for the news. Shall I send her your love, Addie?"

"No, thank you."

"Well," laughed Marian, "there is nothing

left for me to do but to wait for old Marthy's blond man with the great blue eyes."

"Strange things happen in this life of ours,—things that we little dream of, Marian; and while life is young and the future is before you, dream on, dear, of the man with the great blue eyes. It will help you forget the past and the present. And why not live in the Elysian fields of to-morrow?"

CHAPTER XX

A DRAFT ON NEW ORLEANS

THE day after the luncheon Marian said to her old nurse:

"It is strange that I don't hear from Lawyer Horton. I hope he has secured something for us from the property. I dread to think of what will become of us if he is not successful. For I do not get strong as rapidly as I could wish."

"Now, honey, don't pester yo pore heart wid no sich. If de worst cums, time ernuff to worry. It don't do no good ter worry nohow."

"But, Becky, that is all very well to say, but something must be done, and that at once; I shall try to get some music pupils. I could give lessons. Come, help me dress. I shall go and see some of my old friends. I know they will help me all they can."

With many misgivings, Becky prepared her young mistress for her errand. As she placed the widow's bonnet on her mistress's head, Marian shrank from it and threw the long crape veil back from her face.

"I never, never could stand that thing over my face."

"Yes, you must, Miss Marian; dat's de way all de widows do. Dey drap de veil clar down to de bottom ob de dress, an' cover up de face. Dat's de proper way ter show your grief."

"I don't care, I won't wear it so!" impatiently answered Marian.

Becky threw up her hands as her mistress started out.

"Dar she go, wid her grief streamin' down her back. Dat chile do try me so; but it's too bad to kiver up her pretty face wid dat black veil; an' dat's er fact."

Becky found consolation in that thought for Marian's lack of display of a widow's grief and her disregard of propriety.

From door to door wandered Marian. Doors were opened to her, to be sure,—why should she not be admitted to the homes of her old friends? Each appeared glad to see her until she stated her errand, when, with icy politeness, which chilled that sensitive nature, an answer would come in words similar to these:

"It is indeed deplorable that you should have to appeal to your friends. Had you no knowledge whatever of your affairs, before Colonel Tracy ran through your fortune, and left you and your child in this sad condition? It was indeed very unwise to let him have full control. I admit your youth and inexperience of the world are to be deplored. I should like to give you my daughters as pupils, but my Ruth and

Edith have been taking so long from Professor Cripps that I should not like to make the change. Men teachers are so much more thorough,—don't you think so, Marian? and really, I have no excuse to give the Professor if I were to make such a change. You took from him,—did you not?"

"Yes," said Marian.

"Then you will understand my hesitancy in not giving him up, even to oblige you. If it is in my power to help you in any other way, I will be pleased to do so. I might use my influence to get you in one of the Canal Street stores. I think I could arrange it."

"Thank you,"—and her voice was choked with tears; "I have no doubt I could secure a position at any of the stores, as my mother was a patron of them all, and D. H. Holmes has always been a friend of our family."

"Oh, well; I meant it kindly. I don't think I can do anything else for you."

And with an elevation of the eyebrows the hostess arose to dismiss Marian.

The young widow's pale face was a reproach to the cold-hearted woman.

"Independent little beggar!" was her comment as she closed the door.

From home to home Marian wandered, fainting and footsore. At last she was compelled to turn her face homeward.

"I shall find a welcome awaiting me there,"

she thought; and with a brave heart and trusting in the Divine Father, she comforted herself with the thought that to-morrow would bring better success.

It was sundown when she opened the little gate and entered her home. Becky stood sentinel on the gallery. "Lor', chile!" she exclaimed when she saw Marian. "I was dat worried,—I thought something had done happened to you. I jest bet you ain't eat a mouffful dis day; tramping de streets, like pore white trash."

She removed Marian's bonnet, with the offensive crape veil, and with every mark of solicitude for the comfort of her mistress placed her dinner before her.

"Dar, eat 'fore yo try to talk. Too tired to eat? Pore chile, I knows yo is; but you must eat something, den yo kin tell me wah yo's been all day."

Becky could not credit Marian's story.

"Honey, if yo didn't tell me I would not believe it. An' dat's de friends dat eat at yo Mar's table! It was 'Marian dis' an' 'Marian dat' wen dey cum ter yo house. Lor', chile! Ise more sorry yo l'arn de deceit ob dis wicket world dan anything dat could happen to yo."

"Where are little Phyllis and Ophelia?"

"Oh, dey's all right,—dey in de back garden wid Henry. Now yo jest rest an' I tell yo wat Ise been a-doing. I was ober at de grocery store

dis mornin', an' de cook from dat big house on de coner was dar, an' she axes me if I knowed of a fine wash'oman, as de young lady ob de house want ter git her wedding underclothes done up, an' de 'oman dat was ter do 'em done took bery sick. So I up an' said: 'I'll do 'em up fer de young lady.' An' she say: 'Dey will pay you three dollars a dozen, case dey all Vallenseens lace.' I done tole her dat I would be ober to-night to git dem. Now, Miss Marian, please don't say 'no,' case Ophelia is big ernuff to he'p in de house. An' Henry got him a good job, too. De same people wants him to 'tend dey gyaden. Who says we ain't gwine ter libe high? Does yo feel any better an' rested, chile?"

"Oh, yes; but I think I will go to bed, as I want to start out to-morrow early."

"Here's er letter cum to-day fer yo."

Marian took the envelope and studied the address and the post mark,—Washington.

"I don't know any one there. I wonder who it can be that would write me. I do not know the handwriting," she declared.

"I reckon de quickest way ter find out, chile, is ter open it," suggested Becky; which Marian did and read:

MY DEAR MADAM:

I hope you will pardon the seeming liberty I take in addressing you, as I am almost a stranger; but your unfortunate circumstances having come to my knowledge must be my excuse for what, I am aware, is entirely at variance with the rules

of etiquette. Believe me, you have my deepest sympathy in your financial difficulty. My business dealings in the past with Colonel Tracy were of such an intimate nature that I feared the ultimate loss of your fortune under his incompetent management. I venture to offer you the enclosed draft on New Orleans. I hope you will honor me by accepting it in the spirit in which it is sent.

My desire is to help an innocent person for a great wrong done while I was associated with your late husband, and my considering myself morally a debtor are my excuses for what might appear an unwarrantable liberty on my part.

You may recall meeting me at Colonel Tracy's office. There comes a time to every man when he desires to live an honorable, upright life. Could I begin in a better way than by trying to make amends to one so worthy as yourself?

Please accept my best wishes for the future of yourself and little one.

Very sincerely yours,
I. R. Scott.

Marian sat as one stunned.

"Wat dis drap on de flore?" asked Becky, as she handed her mistress the draft on New Orleans.

"I cannot accept it. How cruel poverty is! It puts us in such a position as to be offered alms by a stranger. I shall return it to Mr. Scott at once."

Marian was about to retire when Lawyer Horton's card was brought in by Ophelia.

"Well, Mrs. Tracy; I have some good news for you to-night. I have succeeded in getting some money for you from the marine risk; it will help you out, no doubt."

"I want your advice on a letter I have just received. There was a draft in it for five hundred dollars."

The lawyer whistled.

"That's good!" he said. "Things seem to be coming your way."

"Yes, but I cannot,—I will not accept it, under any consideration."

"Well," laughed Lawyer Horton; "where does my advice come in? Let me see the letter." After reading the letter he handed it back to Marian, saying:

"I call that 'conscience money.' He made a good thing out of that wrecking business with Colonel Tracy, never fear. Better help the poor man live a better life," he laughed. "It would be an unpardonable sin on your part not to do so. I will write him a letter of thanks for you, and I think you may be able to keep the wolf from the door for a while. You remember, I told you about this man Scott,—not a bad sort. He is in a good business now, and that draft is a mere bagatelle to him."

He was taking a critical survey of the house, and was thinking of the great change in her life. As he was leaving, he said in a cheery voice: "Don't you think your fence needs whitewashing?"

"Yes," laughed Marian, "and the house would need painting, had not mother nature covered its defects with this beautiful climbing rose vine. Nature has beautified my little home with a lavish hand, and I have much to be thankful for."

"Perhaps so."

He bade her good-night, and left the house soliloquizing:

"Strange world this is! The men get all the credit of being brave, strong, and courageous; but there is a lesson for the bravest that that frail little woman can teach. Well, well! It's a pity there are not more like her; for it is such as she that make us strong and bring out all the good there is in us. Strength such as hers awakens the God-man in us, and I always feel better for seeing her: she is a true woman,—and a lady shedding everywhere the fragrance of good breeding."

CHAPTER XXI

A LETTER FROM BELL

LONG, weary months rolled by, and Marian longed for some news from her sister Bell in the land beyond the sea. At last the welcome missive arrived. Marian read it aloud to Becky.

MY DEAR SISTER MARIAN:

When I think that this poor little letter has so many, many miles to go, and has to cross that dreadful ocean (I can't even write the word "ocean" without getting seasick). But there I digress. I was writing of this letter. What a time it will be ere your dear eyes can read it, and before it will be in the hands of the dearest sister in the world. It makes me heart-sick when I realize how far apart we are. And we two are all that are left of this once illustrious family!

Can't you bring baby Phyllis and Becky, and come over and visit me? I am sure you would like it here in London,—after you were here a while. It took some time for me to get used to the English and their ways. Charley says he has no patience with me, as we are of English descent; but *decent* Americans I tell him. I do wish you would give me the flag, "The Union Jack" that saved Mamma's property from confiscation. I have told several here of what Edmond did and they remarked: "Quite clever, don't you know! Quite clever! Really extraordinary!"

I must tell you of a good joke, even if it is on me. I went into one of the swell shops on Regent Street. After I had paid for my purchase the "Klark" handed me something rolled up in a small bit of paper. I thought perhaps it might be the custom here, as it is in dear old New Orleans, to give "lagniappe." I opened the paper and found my change. I saw the "Klark" looked surprised. I learned later it was the

custom; ladies were not expected to handle the "dirty money."

The English shopkeepers do not understand our way of shopping,—giving the clerks all the trouble we can, you know, just to amuse ourselves, or spend a pleasant morning, and not spend any money. I thought I would have such a morning here, so I entered a large cloak store and tried on cloak after cloak until a tired, bored look came into the face of the saleslady. "Stop a bit, madame; I will call the forewoman, she may please you. Mrs. Harkins," she called, "will you come here? There is an American that does not know what she does want. I caunt suit her."

Marian, you can imagine that my Southern American temper was at a white heat. When the forewoman came over I said: "I want nothing in your shop," and flounced out. The last thing I heard was: "How extraordinary!"

Are all my friends dead or in a lunatic asylum? I hear nothing from them, and you are a miserable correspondent. Dear Brother Dick must have played the deuce with our property, judging from what I received as my share. I hope, dear, you fared much better. Do write me and let me know how you are getting along; remember that I would be glad to share with you my last cent. Tell Becky the colored people have a fine time over here; they are quite the fad.

With a heart full of love to all the dear ones, I am as ever,

Your sister,

BELL.

"Oh, honey, if Miss Bell only knowed de hard times yo is habin, she would come hyar an' see yo hersef," was Becky's comment.

"Why, Becky, it is no small matter to cross that great ocean. To think,—for days you can see nothing but water and sky. Would you like to go, Becky?"

"What, me? No, indeedy. Not me!"

"It is well that my dear sister does not know of my trouble. Why should I mar her happiness? I have a note from Mr. Smith at Hoffman's on Canal Street. He writes to tell me he can give me a position at the lace counter, and

that I will have to be down at eight o'clock in the morning. There is another girl at the same counter, and she, too, has known adversity, and can sympathize with me."

"Oh, Miss Marian, don't go. Why can't yo stay home? Henry an' me kin earn ernuff to keep us all. But yo standin' 'hind er counter! Oh, chile, dat gwine ter kill me ter think ob it."

And the poor creature could not control her sorrow.

"Come, come, Becky; be brave! I must help too to support us all; and you will see how happy I can be as a shopgirl."

"Oh, hush, chile; don't talk daterway. Sally is savin' up all her money fer you."

"Sally saving up all her money for me! What do you mean, Becky?"

"She done made me promise not ter tell. But yo force it frum me wen yo say yo gwine ter be er shopgal."

"What did Sally say?" insisted Marian.

"She say de day ob de lunch, 'Becky, if Miss Marian need money, come git all Ise got. Ise sabin it fer her; I don't need it, case my 'ciety got ter lay me away wen I is dead.' "

"Poor old Sally!" said Marian; and the tears welled up in her eyes.

The next morning, despite Becky's protestations, Marian was off bright and early for the store. She could hear Becky lamenting as she closed the gate.

"Dar she go, dar she go,—to be er shopgal! Lord habe massy on de pore chile."

After a few days Marian became very happy at her work. True, it was hard to serve those that had been her friends in other days. It was from her fellow-clerks that she received sympathy and love, not from those she served from the other side of the counter. When Mrs. Smith told Mr. Hoffman that her husband had given Marian a position, he said:

"Too bad that she has had to come to the task of earning her own living. Grant her all the favors you can, and make it as easy as possible."

Mr. Hoffman had known Marian since she was a little child; he had been a friend of her family's for years. He made it a point to speak to her every day, so as to make her feel that he was still her old friend that she had known in her mother's home. No reference was made to her changed position in life; she was always treated with that gracious courtesy that every Southern gentleman accords a lady.

Marian had been working at the store some time when one morning Mr. Hoffman, passing through to go to his private office, missed her.

"Where is Mrs. Tracy, Miss McLane?"

"Her little one has scarlet fever, sir."

The next afternoon Mr. Hoffman was driving

up St. Charles Avenue with his friend Mr. Blake.

"By the way, Blake, if you don't mind, I would like to drive by Mrs. Tracy's and inquire about her little one. I heard that it had the scarlet fever. She is the little widow I told you about. It is a sad story. I have known her all her life, and was a friend of her mother's and father's. I never knew a better man than her father was."

The carriage had arrived at the gate when he ceased speaking. Henry saw the visitors, and hastened to hold the horses.

"How is Mrs. Tracy, old man?" asked Mr. Hoffman.

"Poorly, poorly, sah; de baby got de 'carlet feber."

"Go and ask Mrs. Tracy to come out here in the garden a moment."

"Yassah; I will go an' tell her, sah."

Marian was not aware that a stranger was with Mr. Hoffman when she hastened out to meet him. She looked very spiritual and made a pretty picture in her long flowing white wrapper,—with her pale face and drooping lashes,—standing there talking to her old friend among the flowers; at least, so thought George Blake.

"George, I want you to meet Mrs. Tracy," called Mr. Hoffman.

Mr. Blake left the carriage and came forward

to be introduced. She extended her hand in cordial welcome,—custom in the South when a stranger is introduced by an old friend.

Mr. Blake looked into Marian's eyes as he took her hand, and wondered to himself: "Where have I seen that face before?" Think as he would, he could not recall where he had seen her, but the picture she made standing there among the flowers, in her sad, pensive mood, was indelibly stamped upon his memory from that hour.

CHAPTER XXII

GEORGE BLAKE IS IMPRESSED

"Do you know, Hoffman, that I am very favorably impressed with that little lady. She seems a very nice person."

"Whom are you talking about, George?"

"Why, Mrs. Tracy."

"Oh, yes; she is a dear little woman; as I said before, I was well acquainted with her family. Her father was a large slaveowner before the war. He died at the beginning of the late unpleasantness; her mother followed soon after the emancipation of the slaves. There were three children left, and there was quite a fortune to be divided among them. Mrs. Tracy was the eldest. One is now married and living in London, England. The youngest child died. Mrs. Tracy was married to her guardian when she was but a child. He made ducks and drakes of the fortune. The same old story: 'Wine, Women, and Song.' He was murdered,—you may recall the incident. The perpetrators of the crime were never brought to justice. It was supposed to be the work of his mistress, who was found dead the next morning,—dead, by

her own hand. Mrs. Tracy and her child were left destitute."

"It is a sad story indeed!" said Mr. Blake. "These Southern women surprise me how bravely they bear adversity, considering the way they have been brought up to have no thought of to-morrow!"

"Well, Blake, it is a well-known fact that our women rise up and meet reverses in a grand and noble way, and we are very proud of them."

"I feel confident that I have seen Mrs. Tracy somewhere before," said Mr. Blake thoughtfully.

"In the store, no doubt."

"It does seem hard that she has to struggle so for mere bread, when others have so much of this world's goods. I suppose it would be a mistake if I, out of my ample store, should offer to help her."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Hoffman. "I should like to see Marian's face if you should offer to help her. You are a great fellow, George! If your kind and noble impulses were understood by others as I understand them many a poor widow's cup of sorrow would be sweetened; but, alas! we are compelled to conform to conventionality. There would be no harm, however, in calling to see her, if you cared to do so."

George Blake had decided that question in his mind long ago. And it was not many days be-

fore he called on Marian. Many visits followed, and, in a delicate way, he found excuses to send her fruit and flowers,—thus one little attention after another was showered upon her. One bright Sabbath afternoon he called to try and prevail upon her to take a drive with him in his new turn-out; and Marian was very glad to avail herself of his kind invitation.

"Mr. Blake," she said, as they drove up the avenue, "you are a Southerner, are you not?"

"No, I am not. I am what you might call a 'Yankee.' I am from the good old state of Massachusetts, but I have been in business in New Orleans for so many years that I feel like a native. My Father, Mother, and sister live near Boston. My mother has some queer ideas of the South and the negro race. She is for the advancement and education of the negroes. I am myself. A little affair occurred not long ago, which amused me in regard to my mother's overzealous solicitude for the black race. It has been my custom to send Mother a check once in so often for her pet charities. The other day she wired me, 'Last check lost. Wire number.' I did so, and learned from her letter that she had given the check to help build a church for the colored people. So you see I am here working to supply money to build nigger churches."

"But you gave it to her to do with as she pleased. If it were her pleasure, you surely do

not mind. Your mother should see my old nurse and her beautiful devotion to me."

"Oh, no!" laughed Mr. Blake. "She would then want me to build a home for ex-slaves. She has known only the hard side of slave life that she gathered from the story of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,'—not the true side in most cases in the South, as your old servants and many others could testify. I have never seen a mother more devoted to her child than is your old black nurse to you. It is indeed very remarkable, as the colored people seem to feel their independence now."

"Yes; but I could never think of Becky other than as my old nurse. As long as she lives nothing could part us."

Marian had returned to her work in the store after little Phyllis recovered, and each day found her at the lace counter. Mr. Hoffman asked her one day:

"How do you like my friend, Mr. Blake? He is the salt of the earth, Marian; and I hope that he and you may become good friends. It would please me greatly to see the union of the North and the South."

For days this remark troubled Marian; she could not put it from her.

"The union of the North and the South? What did he mean?" she kept asking herself.

Marian had not seen Mr. Blake for days. She feared that he did not feel so kindly to the South

as he had expressed himself. That he could care for her was most foreign to her thoughts. She did miss his kind attentions and pleasant drives, and she could not but admit that his absence made a void in her dull, care-worn life.

Mr. Hoffman called at the St. Charles Hotel one evening to see his friend.

"Well, old man, it's a wonder that you would not tell a fellow that you were going away. I missed you and found you were out of the city."

"Yes; I took a run up to Boston to see the old folks; just got back an hour ago. My visit did me a great deal of good. The little Mother was as sweet and dainty as ever, but she can never forgive me for not fulfilling her expectations. She intended me for a Baptist minister."

"Ha, ha! I don't think you could fill the bill, but,"—and his tone changed—"I think there are far worse men in the pulpit than you are, my friend. You don't affect the sheep's clothing; the wolf in you can be seen, and I honor you for it. You are what you are."

"Well, as I was saying, Mother is disappointed. When I was a boy she would lick me for the devil that was in me, and cry over me, and pray that I might live to see the error of my ways. I hope the dear little Mother has some comfort with me now."

"Were you the only child?"

"Oh, no; there were three boys and a half-sister,—the child by my father's first wife. I being Mother's first-born, she would make all kinds of excuses for me. My brother Charles was always the dear goody-goody little boy, on the Lord Fauntleroy style,—always had his hands nice and clean, his shirt ruffles never mussed, and would sit by the hour and read the Bible. He should have been a Baptist minister. He never gave Mother or Father any trouble. He has manifested these same characteristics throughout his life. I am sure that he has remained unsullied from his contact with the world. Horace, the youngest, is a kind of a cross between us,—neither one thing nor the other. Not too devilish to reform, or too good to spoil. When a boy he ran away from home, 'to make his mark in the world,' as he put it. The same night he was back again. 'Well,' said Father, 'what brought you back so soon?' 'I was hungry, and I don't like the dark nights away from home.' That's his disposition. He won't run away from a good thing, and he wants the other fellow to work for it. He is a great fellow now,—artist, author, and whatnot. Chiefly he makes his home in Europe now. By the way, Hoffman, how is the little widow?"

"Quite ill, so Miss McLane tells me. She has not been to the store for several days. I am afraid she is too frail to stand the work; I don't know what she will do. That old black nurse

and her husband, Henry, would work their fingers to the bone for her and the little one."

That evening Mr. Blake sent a note,—along with some lovely flowers,—to Marian, expressing his sympathy and asking permission to call as soon as she could receive him.

CHAPTER XXIII

UNION OF THE NORTH AND SOUTH

Mr. Blake waited several days, but did not hear from Marian.

"I can at least go and inquire for her," he decided at length.

Becky came out to meet him.

"It's too bad; but Miss Marian bery sick an' can't see nobody: she get de flowers yo sont her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"De Doctor say it nervious prosteration; dat wat he call it."

"What are you doing for her?"

"Well, de Doctor say she must habe brandy an' cracked ice all de time; but she won't take it,—she don't like de stuff."

"'Where did you get the brandy?"

"At de corner grocery; it ought to be good, case dey charge me four-bits fo de tiniest little mite."

"Throw the stuff away at once. I will be back as soon as I can with some for her."

That night when the old doctor came, Becky told him about the brandy. He poured out a generous drink and said:

"Here's to you, George Blake! it is in a good cause,—the North and the South."

Marian had youth and a good constitution in her favor, and with Becky's tender care, she was soon herself again. Mr. Blake had been a dear friend to her during her illness. Birds and dainties of all kinds were sent to her each day from Mereau's,—delicacies that her slender purse could not supply. Marian understood and appreciated his tender heart, and never questioned its impulse.

As soon as she was able their drives were resumed, and many a pleasant afternoon they spent in Audubon Park under the shelter of the great oaks.

"Mrs. Tracy, I would like to have you read a letter I received from my Mother," he said one day, handing it to her.

"I consider it a great honor," said Marian, and opening it, read:

MY DARLING FIRST-BORN:

Your dear letter has been left unanswered too long, but I know your pardon is already granted when I tell you that the neglect of my beloved son has been caused by Mattie, the one I hope some day to call my daughter. She is here visiting your sister; she is a charming woman, talented in every way, and, best of all, loves my boy.

You are free to choose a wife, but it has always been the wish of your father and myself that it might be Mattie. It is one of the best recommendations for a girl when the son's mother thinks she is the one girl to make her boy happy.

Think it over, question your own heart, and write your mother soon. May God bless you, my boy.

Your loving

MOTHER.

"I hope, Mr. Blake, that you will do as your mother and father wish, and enjoy every happiness that you deserve."

Marian's lips paled as the lie escaped them, for she had learned to love George Blake.

"I fear I shall have to answer you, Mrs. Tracy, as I did my mother."

"How is that?"

Her cheeks flushed as he gazed upon her.

"I cannot marry Mattie, as I am in love with some one else; and am very well satisfied with the lady that possesses my heart's affections."

"Well, I think it is too bad to disappoint your mother."

He ignored her reply, and puffed away at his cigar for a few moments.

"By the way, I met an old friend of yours the other day at the Cotton Exchange."

He was watching Marian's face very closely, although apparently speaking in an indifferent tone of voice. "Your friend called to me across the floor of the Exchange: 'I say, Blake, how is Mrs. Tracy?' I called him to me, and when we were face to face I said: 'Seymour, that little woman owns me body and soul.'" A cry escaped Marian. "There now, it is out and over with, and I feel better. Now, Marian, I am yours to command."

"I had never dreamed such happiness was for me."

And Marian hid her flushed face on her lover's shoulder.

"I have loved you from the first time that I saw you standing in your little garden,—never for one moment have you been absent from my thoughts. You have had such a hard, bitter struggle, little woman; don't you think you had better dump your burdens onto my shoulders at once. The sooner you become my wife the better."

"But I have no wardrobe," laughed Marian.

"You never could look prettier to me if you were dressed in silks and velvets. You are perfectly beautiful in my eyes."

"Silks and velvets!" she murmured. "'A blond man with blue eyes gwine to love you as long as he lives.'" She threw herself into his arms, and sobbed hysterically. "God bless old Marthy!"

Then, after she had composed herself, Marian explained to George Blake how old Marthy had comforted her when she was in so much trouble, by telling her fortune.

"And now, dear, it is all so true. My savior, my blue-eyed love," she whispered.

They returned home to talk over their plans for the future. It was far into the night ere he departed. Love knows no time. Old Becky was waiting up for her young mistress, and had a steaming cup of coffee for her.

"I feared yo would be tired, chile, so I made yo a cup o' coffee."

"Oh, Becky, I am so happy! I am to be married to Mr. Blake at once."

Becky took Marian in her arms and cried over her as if she were her mother.

"Thank God, chile, you will be happy at last! I reckon Mr. Blake's de one,—he blond man, wid blue eyes. He's a curious man, but den I guess yo knows how ter take him."

In a few days the wedding took place and they had started on their trip to New York. They put up at the Gilsey House, starting out the next day on their shopping tour.

"The sooner we get the trousseau the better," laughed Blake.

It was a new experience for him, and a grand holiday for Marian. Such a display of gowns at the shops that were laid out for Marian's inspection! Madam Marie's was next visited, and Mr. Blake showed such anxious concern that his wife should have all she fancied that Madam Marie's business eyes opened very quickly to the fact that there was a willing husband with a big purse; so she waited upon them herself.

"This is just the hat for your wife, sir," she said, placing a French model upon Marian's head. "She is very beautiful in that. Do you not think so?"

The price was never questioned, so several

of Madam Marie's hats were sent to Mrs. George Blake at the Gilsey House.

"Aren't we having lots of fun?" said her husband, as he took one hat after another from the boxes, and undid numberless packages that lay on the bed. "I call this great! I haven't had so much fun in a long time."

Marian could only say:

"But think of all the money we have spent, and all the dresses that are to come yet."

"Well, what's the good of money, my dear, if you can't spend it? Poor little woman!" he said, as he took her in his arms, "you have had to count your pennies for so long that this, no doubt, seems a sinful waste of money. But never fear; there is a lot more, and believe me, you have only to express a wish and it will be gratified. I am what would be considered a very rich man, and can amply afford to grant my little wife any extravagances she may care to indulge in. I never realized before how much happiness could be derived from the expenditure of a little money. Why," he laughed, "I shall consider it great fun to pay your bills."

And he fondly kissed his wife's puzzled face.

The Blakes had been in New York a week, when Mr. Blake's brother Charles called.

"Horace and our wives are going to Boston on the Fall River boat at five o'clock," he announced. "Won't you come down and see us off?"

"Will you go, dear?" said Marian's husband.

"If your brothers will excuse me, I would rather not, as my head aches; but you go."

The three brothers started off, and Marian retired to her room, took a nap, and was much refreshed; so she dressed for dinner. The hands on the little French clock pointed at eight, still her husband did not return. She watched from the windows up Broadway. The suspense was becoming unbearable, when Mr. Blake's beaming face peeped in at the door. He took his wife in his arms and sat down with her on his knee.

"Such a time as we have had! Did you think that I had run away from you? The steamer started off with me before I knew it. You can imagine my surprise. I appealed to Charles. I said, 'I cannot go; I must go back to my wife.' 'Oh, why not go on with us to Boston, as long as you have started? You can wire your wife in the morning.' I said: 'I shall get back to-night, if I have to swim.' 'Oh, well,' said my brother, 'come on then, and we will interview the captain and see what can be done.' That little brother of mine spoke up like a trump.

"'Captain,' he said, 'my brother is being carried off against his wish; his wife is ill at the Gilsey House, and he must return to her to-night. What can be done to get him ashore?' 'Well,' said the captain, 'that is quite a problem.' 'He must get back,' insisted Charles;

'something must be done.' And you may be sure, that when Charles starts a thing, he never lets up until he has accomplished what he started out to do. The captain said: 'I could hail a pilot boat, if your brother can go down the rope ladder.' A boat was hailed; and I descended that rope ladder like an old sailor; and dropped into the little boat as it tossed and tossed in the wake of the *Pilgrim*. I raised my hat in salute; cheer after cheer went up from the passengers gathered on the deck to see me descend. That brother of mine is a great fellow! How do you like him, dear?"

"I should like him very much, did he but like me."

"Why, Marian; you wrong him greatly. Think what he did to save you worry."

She did not reply, for she knew full well that it was not for her he had urged the Captain to get George ashore, but because George wished it.

"Little woman, I fear that you are jealous of my great love for Charles, and his love for me. Do not be. You will find a true and loyal friend in Charles always. As the old saying goes: 'It's accidents that make brothers, but hearts make friends.' So, little woman, you must learn to love my brother Charles, first, for my sake,—until you know him better,—then I am sure that you will love him for himself."

CHAPTER XXIV

MARIAN IN CAMBRIDGE

THE Blakes returned home. Becky greeted Marian with the glad exclamation:

"Lor', chile, what Mister George done ter you? I never see you look so pretty an' so happy in all your life."

"Love and happiness beautify the plainest face; and, oh, Becky, I am so happy!" said Marian contentedly, grabbing the old nurse and dancing about the room.

"Lor', Mis' Marian," said Ophelia, as she stood in wonder, looking at Marian. "You so spry I reckon yo could dance jubber."

"Look at little Phyllis. Ain't she fine, honey?" asked Becky, as she held the child up for its mother's kiss.

"Indeed she is. I knew that you would take good care of her for me."

Marian and her husband went to the St. Charles Hotel until they could find a suitable home. Phyllis was left with Becky in the little home on Leontine Street until the Blakes were settled. Mrs. Baynard, who had returned from her trip abroad, hastened down to the hotel to

see Marian and congratulate her on her happy change of circumstances. Mr. Blake shook hands with her most cordially. "I think you ladies would enjoy a *tête-à-tête,* so I will be off to my office," he said, and was off.

"Show me all your pretty things," said Mrs. Baynard.

It was with pleasure that Marian displayed her gowns, hats, and wraps, laughing as she told her friend how she was afraid she was spending too much money, and what fun her husband made of her,—how he teased her about it.

"I would not have felt so. I would like to try it! My dear old Will is the best man in the world, but he is not a millionaire."

Marian showed her a large diamond cross.

"A present from my dear brother-in-law," she explained.

"It is beautiful. I could bear that cross, and not complain. That is a cross a Christian might worship and a Jew adore."

Mrs. Baynard was very glad to assist her friend in settling in her new home. They spent many happy days together selecting the furnishings. Marian had appealed to her husband for advice, but he, laughing, said:

"It's my part to pay the bills; the rest I leave to you and Mrs. Baynard."

Mr. Blake advised Marian to give the little home on Leontine Street to her faithful nurse Becky and her husband for their life's devotion

to her. Grateful as they were for the gift, they begged that they might remain in Marian's service during the day and go home at night; and this arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to Mr. Blake and Marian, who felt that she could not part with her dear old Becky.

One day George Blake tossed a letter into Marian's lap, saying:

"Read that aloud to me."

It was a letter from Mr. Blake's old father, and Marian read:

MY DEAR SON:

I learn from others that you are very, very happy in your new home with your wife, that she is very affectionate and kind, and that you love her dearly and that your love is reciprocated. That is just as it should be. And now, my dear boy, see to it that on your part nothing shall be done or left undone to change the state of feelings that now exist.

Stay at home, be kind, and ask God daily to give you wisdom; and may you both have grace of patience, kindness, forbearance, and mutual love. Remember that your strength is weakness; that you must look to God for wisdom.

We are all well, but your Mother is much grieved that you did not bring your wife to see us. She bids me say she hopes you will show more discretion in the future, and let your wife see that you can be a gentleman by introducing her to your family at least. With much love from all,

Your father,
I. D. BLAKE.

"There, Marian, you see the opinion my parents have of me? They can't believe but what I am still the bad boy of my younger days. I shall leave it to you to tell them what a nice fellow I am," laughed her husband.

It had been Marian's wish that some day she

might visit her husband's people. The next day Becky handed her a letter. The old nurse was no longer afraid of ill news in any letter that might come to her young mistress. Marian opened the envelope and found that it was from her husband's mother. It ran:

MY DEAR DAUGHTER:

If you will excuse pencil, I will write you this very evening. First, I will thank you for your kind and entertaining letter and for thinking of one whom you have never seen, when you are so far away, surrounded by your loved ones. What a treasure little Phyllis must be to you; what a pleasure to see her grow in years and in love and affection for you!

I often feel that mothers do not enjoy all the pleasure they might when they have their children with them, receiving and giving in sweet interchange of family affections and interest. They are too apt to let the petty cares and perplexities, which they must sometimes endure, interrupt the sweet harmony and devotion to each other, which might be a perpetual feast to the heart and life. How many, many regrets, too, poor mothers have in after life that they have let so much precious enjoyment pass by unheeded or unappreciated.

You think you will not be able to come to me in the Fall. It seems to me you could come to your mother. I hope you will make your plans so that you will be able to make us a nice long visit. Charles is anxious for us,—that is, your father, Phœbe, and myself,—to winter in California; but I think it very doubtful. When you come we will talk it over.

Give my love to my dear son, a kiss for little Phyllis, and my love and well wishes for yourself.

Your affectionate

MOTHER.

Mr. Blake replied to his father's letter in a characteristic manner. He wrote:

I have not said much of my wife in my letters home. This morning she was the recipient of a charming letter from Mother. I appreciate her kind expressions to the dearest little wife in the world. It is not necessary for me to say that I only extol my wife's good qualities to those willing to listen. You will love Marian when you know her, for you and Mother love

just the qualities she possesses. She is one that would not cry out, even if she were dying. There isn't a mean streak or a selfish thought in her make-up, and she loves me as greatly as even you and dear Mother can desire. She is one of the kind that no matter who it is that comes within her influence that person is the happier for it.

I should like my wife and sister to meet each other and become acquainted. As you write you are going to take Mother to Bangor, Maine, for August, I invite Phœbe to join us at Manchester-by-the-Sea at the Masconomo House. We will leave here on the 28th of this month.

With love to all at home,

Your loving son,
GEORGE.

Those that have spent a summer at that delightful hostelry, the Masconomo House at Manchester-by-the-Sea, can have only pleasant memories of that ideal spot. To Marian it was a continuous series of surprises,—her introduction to Eastern life. The people there were much amused at Marian's Southern accent and mannerisms.

After a happy month spent together Phœbe and Marian had become good friends for life. They hurried on to Cambridge to meet their father and mother on their home-coming from their visit to Maine.

Marian entered the old Blake home with much temerity. It was no gentle ordeal to have to pass through,—to meet the parents of your husband,—and as Marian felt she was not the first daughter-in-law presented by George,—and the first having been entirely unsatisfactory, she hoped she might win for herself the love she craved.

Her fears were groundless, for she was taken into the home of her husband's parents, who had a great deal of love in their hearts for the little Southern wife of their dear son.

Marian was resting from her journey when she heard Phœbe say:

"Mother, how do you like George's wife?"

"All that I will say now, Phœbe, is that she is just the one for my son George."

A week had passed and Mr. Blake was compelled to return to New Orleans. His mother urged that Marian remain with her a little longer. Marian was very loath to have her husband go without her; but as her own pleasure was secondary with her, she thought she ought to please the dear mother that had welcomed her so sweetly to her heart and home. What a peaceful, happy home it was, sanctified by the presence of that noble Christian mother and the dear, kindly, benevolent old father.

Years of piety and charity for their fellowmen had purified the souls of the older Blakes. The very atmosphere about them bespoke the purity of their lives. Marian felt that it was a sweet haven of rest after her storm-tossed life. She had been so young when her own mother passed on to a higher life that she did not realize the great happiness of a mother's love. While her own heart knew love for her little one, it was a strange, sweet experience to be

taken to a mother's heart, and feel such sweet confidence and love.

"Now that George has gone back to the South, we shall have such nice times together, you and I," said Mother. "I shall have you all to myself. It is my wish that you remain with us for some time. The happy event that we are all looking forward to I did not dare to hope to realize; and I promise you that all a mother can do will be done to make your stay happy among us."

"But, Mother, you expect to go to California soon, do you not?"

"No; I shall not go. I am too happy here in my home with you, Father, and Phœbe. So do not let that worry you, my child. We will be happy here together. I am very anxious to be a grandma, so you cannot drive me to California."

CHAPTER XXV

ALL'S WELL WITH ME, ISAAC

One morning Phœbe and Marian were enjoying a pleasant chat over their summer spent at the seashore when Father entered, evidently much disturbed. He seated himself and tried to join in the merry chat, but he could not conceal his anxiety. Marian was the first to notice his abstracted manner.

"Why, Father, why so downcast? What is the matter?"

"Nothing, child," he answered.

"I insist upon knowing what troubles you," she said. And going over to the old man, she kissed him affectionately. "Now, Father, come, 'fess up, as the children say."

"My dear child, your mother has received a letter from Charles, which has caused her to shed tears, and she is now writing to George to ask his advice upon her going to California at once."

"Why should she be distressed about that?"

"It's the thought of leaving you, after she has prevailed upon you to stay, dear."

"I will go to her at once, and relieve her mind."

"Oh, you must not; she did not want you to know, and forbade me to tell you."

"Oh, pshaw!" laughed Marian. "Trust me to make Mother happy; and I promise you she won't scold you for telling me."

And away she went to her mother's room. She found her busy writing.

"Do I intrude?" asked Marian.

"No, my child; you are always welcome in your mother's room."

Marian stood beside the table on which lay two letters,—one addressed to Charles, the other to George.

"Writing to my husband? What did you tell him about me? May I read it?"

"No, my child; I would rather you did not."

"Now, you are the typical old mother-in-law referred to so often in the funny papers," laughed Marian. "Thank you; I shall take the liberty of perusing it myself."

And before her mother could stay her, she was off to her room with the letters.

"Poor loving little Mother! What a conflict she must have had with herself to decide between love and duty, and the preservation of her health and perhaps her life!" Marian could not restrain her tears as she read:

My Darling Boy:

What will you think of me when I tell you I am about to leave your precious wife before the advent of the little one. I have prayed that I might live to hold my first grandchild in my arms; and now I am running away! It seems inhuman

to leave your wife when you have brought her to your mother's home, and she has left her little Phyllis with her old nurse to be with us. She has begged me to go and not risk the chance of getting pneumonia this winter. I enclose Charles' letter. You will see that it is his express wish that I go at once.

Forgive me, my son; but I long to live and enjoy all the blessings our dear Lord has bestowed upon me. Your dear wife and sister urge me to seek the balmy climate of California. As Marian so sweetly said: "I do not want to lose my little Mother now that I have learned to love her so much."

Bless you, my boy. I thank the Heavenly Father that He has given you so sweet a wife and me such a loving daughter.

Your ever loving
MOTHER.

"Mother dear," she said when she returned the letters, "why should you apologize to George for going to California? It is for your own good, and Charles is right when he says you must be our first consideration; for we will never see the time when we can give you up. I shall tell that husband of mine to write you a nice loving letter and send you on your way rejoicing. Cheer up, little Mother; you will come back to us in the spring, and then you can have your grandchild all to yourself. I shall have dear Father and Phœbe to keep me company while you are away, and we will write to you daily."

In a day or so Mrs. Blake started on her trip, spending a few days in New York with Charles and his wife before starting on her long western journey. Her letters were looked forward to with great pleasure by those left behind. On reaching San Francisco she wrote:

I have had such a dear letter from George, who enclosed a check for a large amount for my personal needs. I fear I am somewhat homesick for the dear ones at home. Write me daily.

With love to all,

MOTHER.

The home resumed its calm and peaceful routine of daily life, but the dear mother was sadly missed,—by none as much as Father. But he had learned the lesson of resignation in all things; therefore he uttered no complaints, showing only solicitude for the comfort and happiness of others. The daily drives were taken with Marian. On their return home one day a telegram awaited them. It was from Horace, and read:

Mother took cold on trip. We fear pneumonia.

Marian felt a heavy load on her heart and dark forebodings of evil took possession of her. She tried to comfort the old husband.

"Don't worry, Father. It was a hard trip for Mother; but with Horace's loving care she will soon be herself again."

Constant telegraphic communication was kept up with George, in New Orleans, and Charles, in New York, and with all the anxious hearts waiting and watching for some encouraging report. One short week had passed, and the Sabbath had come again, bringing another telegram:

Mother has passed the crisis. Hope for the best.

What rejoicing and thanksgiving went up to the throne of the Most High! Father lay his head on Marian's shoulder and wept for very joy. Neighbors came in to hear the glad tidings.

That evening as Marian was resting, with Father seated in his great red chair by the heater talking of Mother's homecoming, Phœbe looked in and said:

"You two look so cozy, I think I will go to evening service."

"Go, by all means; I will keep Marian company," urged Father.

It was not long before the dear old man was fast asleep. Marian laughed and said:

"I might as well follow suit."

So pulling the pillow to a comfortable position, she was soon asleep herself. In a short time she awoke, springing up from the couch in great fear. The old man threw his arms about her.

"What is it, my child? Are you ill? Shall I send for a doctor? How you tremble!"

"No, I am not sick,—I am all right now, but I had a frightful dream and it frightened me."

Phœbe came in just then, and the old man said to her:

"Help your sister to bed. She is very nervous."

And as he kissed her good-night, he added:

"I, too, had a bad dream: I thought your

mother came and placed her hand on my head and said: 'All is well with me, Isaac.' "

"No doubt it was because we were talking about her when we fell asleep. I hope, Father, that you will rest well and think all is well with dear Mother."

It was a long restless night for Marian. She was glad to see the morning sun rising.

"What's your hurry, Marian?" said Phœbe, as Marian rang for her maid. "You are not going to get up yet, are you?"

"Yes, dear; I can't sleep, so I'd better get up." And her maid entering in answer to her ring, she ordered: "Get my bath ready, please."

"You seem nervous, ma'am."

"Oh, I am nervous! I am so worried about Mother."

"Shure, ma'am, you have no need. Didn't the telegram say she was out of danger? Let me brush your hair now. Don't fret yourself."

"No, go away. I want to be alone."

"Well, here is the doctor, ma'am."

"How is our little Southerner this morning? Nervous? Oh, pshaw; that won't do! You had good news yesterday. I am glad indeed to learn that your Mother is better."

"Yes," said Marian. "But yesterday is not to-day, and I fear that it will be bad news to-day. I think Mother is dead."

"Why do you say that?"

"I dreamed she came to me last night. Father did also."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the doctor. Listen to Mrs. White singing across the hall. She does not share your fears. Bad news travels fast. You Southerners with your superstitions and signs and hoodoos would drive us poor, staid, slow-going New Englanders insane."

"Wait. Don't taunt me with my Southern traits of character. I ask you only to wait and see."

The doctor turned to mix a quieting powder to give her, when the messenger boy came in and handed Phœbe the telegram.

"O doctor, go,—go at once to her!"

"No hurry," said the doctor. "Take this medicine to quiet those poor nerves."

A heartbroken cry came from Phœbe's room.

"Now, will you go?" asked Marian, sitting up in the bed, her dark eyes flashing fire. The doctor sought Mrs. White in her parlor across the hall. Sob after sob was shaking her frame. After the doctor had succeeded in quieting her he returned to Marian. "When did you say you thought your mother died?"

"Half-past seven last night."

"Listen to this." And he read aloud Horace's telegram.

Mother's sweet spirit took its heavenly flight at half-past seven last night.

The doctor took his departure. Then Marian said to her maid: "Go at once and tell Father to come here to me. Nothing more, remember. Leave the room, Phœbe dear, and make no noise."

Soon she heard her father's voice saying:

"Mary said you wanted me, my child."

"Yes, Father dear. Come in and close the door. I have bad news."

"Has that son of mine been writing you disagreeable letters?"

"No, no; it is not George. It is Mother."

And Marian threw her arms about his neck and buried his head upon her breast, holding him fast as she whispered gently in his ear: "Mother has gone to her heavenly rest. She came to us last night, dear, to bid us good-by."

Convulsive sobs shook the poor old man's frame as he rested in Marian's arms. At length he raised his blanched face and said: "She said to me: 'All's well with me, Isaac.' Do not grieve, dear child! It will be Heaven for us, not California. Man proposes, God disposes. It is well done. Blessed be His Holy name."

He bore the loss of his dearly loved partner, —who, as he said, had been his ministering angel through all his life,—with Christian fortitude.

What a lesson of the grand submission to the Divine Will of our Heavenly Father!

CHAPTER XXVI

CHARLES BLAKE AND HIS YOUNG NIECE

The little church that Mother attended so many years was decked with choicest flowers for the reception of all that was mortal of that saintly and noble woman. At Charles' orders, the family pew was banked with white roses,—fair symbols of her pure life.

Alas! how soon our loved ones are laid away in their silent graves! How the heart aches to return to the home bereft of the dear dead! It was the old man, coming back to that home,—empty for him now,—leaning on the arms of his sons George and Charles, that called forth the sympathy of all.

Charles and Horace returned to their homes. George remained with his wife and father to comfort one and cheer the other through her trying time. How often Marian looked back on the past and thought of her young life in the South when she became a mother for the first time. She had only her faithful old black nurses Becky and Mammy Sophy to comfort and cheer her then. Now it was all changed. All that loving hands could do was done for her.

One morning at an early hour Marian awoke her husband and said:

"Get up quietly, the stork is at the window."

"The what?" asked her husband, drowsy with sleep.

"The stork. And you had better get the doctor at once. No time to waste," she laughed.

That night the doctor announced to the expectant household that a daughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. Blake.

George was a father!

He wired the news to Charles.

Mother and child doing nicely. But father all broken up.

"Why, George!" said his wife. "What will Charles think of you?"

"He will think that I am a very lucky fellow. I take the little silver cup that Mother has kept for so many years for her first grandchild. It is too bad that dear Mother could not have lived to realize her fondest hopes. But for that fatal trip to California, she might have been with us yet."

"Doctor," asked Mr. Blake a few weeks after the arrival of the little one, "when can I return to New Orleans? My business needs me, and I am anxious to get the house in readiness for the home-coming of my wife and daughter."

"You may go at once. There is no reason for delay."

So, with minute instructions to the doctor as

to the care of his wife and child, Blake returned to New Orleans.

One evening some time after George's departure Mrs. White said:

"Marian, Charles has come from New York, and wants to see his niece."

The trained nurse, who was high in authority in the sick chamber, asserted her prerogative, saying:

"Not now, Mrs. White; my patients are settled for the night. I shall be pleased to present the baby to her uncle in the morning."

It had been Charles' custom when weary with business cares to go to Cambridge for a rest, to be petted and made much of by his dear mother. Men, after all, are only overgrown boys, and mother's home is always a good place to go to. His sister now took the dear mother's place in ministering to his comfort. It was her pleasure to prepare dainty dishes for breakfast and bring them to his bedside. He had just finished his morning's repast when the trained nurse knocked at the door.

"May Miss Blake come in?"

Phœbe hastened to open the door. The nurse entered with her charge; she removed baby's cap and wrap and laid the little one in the bed in the arms of her uncle, who laughed heartily when he saw the little one's marked resemblance to his brother George. He gazed

with loving eyes upon that baby that nestled so contentedly in his arms.

Wealth was his, a loving wife to share his joys and sorrows, he was honored by his fellow-men,—in short, all that could make life pleasant was his to command. But all his wealth could not buy for him what he now held upon his arms: a child that he might call his own. He had never known the clasp of baby fingers nor listened to the patter of little feet echoing through the house. Baby lips had never lisped their evening prayer of "God bless my Papa." Empty hearts, how much you miss in life!

"I should say this was George in miniature. Phœbe, could I believe in reincarnation I would think Mother's sweet spirit was embodied in this mite of humanity. There is the same sweet expression in her eyes and around that rosebud mouth. God grant that she may grow to be like Mother in sweet womanly grace, and possessed of her noble traits of character!"

It was a new and sweet experience to Charles to fondle a tiny baby. When the nurse returned for the little one she said:

"Why, Mr. Blake, you look quite contented."

"I fear I am somewhat awkward in the rôle of a nurse," he laughed.

"The baby's father did not do near as well. He was afraid to touch her, for fear she might fall to pieces," said the nurse.

"Please tell Mrs. Blake that I should like to

pay my respects to her this morning, if I may."

"I shall announce your coming to Mrs. Blake, and prepare her for your visit."

The nurse selected a creamy white cashmere wrapper elaborately trimmed in billowy lace. Shortly afterward, Phœbe came to the door, pleasantly calling:

"Are you ready for company, dear?"

"Come in," said Marian.

Phœbe and her brother entered. Charles approached Marian and said:

"I wish to congratulate you on your recovery. You are looking exceedingly well, and I am very proud of my niece. She promises to be a fine child. Tell George I enjoyed the sensation of taking papa's place this morning. And now I ask you, Marian, that as she grows in years she be taught that next to her father she must look to her Uncle Charles; for I am sure I shall love her dearly. Have you decided on a name?"

"No," said Marian laughingly; "George wants you to name her."

I appreciate the honor and feel confident that George will agree with me that she should be named for her grandmother, Mary Blake."

What happiness it was to the dear old grandfather to sit and hold the baby!

"I recall a saying of your Mother's," he said to Marian, "that 'into this lonely life of ours oft come angels unawares; close not the door of

your heart for they do not tarry with us always.'"

"Father dear, let us look upon the baby as a link between earth and heaven,—one that links us with the dear Mother gone before."

Marian's thoughts turned now toward her own little Phyllis far away in her Southern home, with her Auntie and her nurse Becky; and it was not many weeks before she and the nurse were on their way to the land of the magnolia and orange blossoms.

"How glad I shall be to get home!" Marian would say as she looked from her drawing-room window in the car.

"Yes," agreed the nurse; "but the nearer you get to your home the farther away from my home I go."

Mr. Blake met them at the depot.

"We are very happy to have you home," he said to his wife after they had entered the carriage. "How is my daughter, Mrs. House?"

"Quite well and stood the trip admirably."

"Here we are," Blake said as the horses stopped at the gate.

Becky was the first to welcome the arrivals. She took Marian in her arms and kissed and cried over her for very joy, saying: "O chile, I is so glad ter git yo back ergin."

The eastern nurse gazed in wonder at Becky, and a look of disgust crossed her face as she saw Marian return the caresses. Becky now

raised little Phyllis to her mother's arms, saying:

"Dar; yo kin see fo yo'se'f. Yo don't need ter ax how she is."

The little one clung to her mother for fear she might be parted again. Ophelia stood with her mouth open, her white teeth glistening between her full red lips.

"Kin we see de little Yankee baby?" she asked the nurse.

"No, no! Go away! I cannot let you touch her."

"Lor', yo don't need ter be so 'fraid. I ain't guine ter hurt her."

The nurse pushed Ophelia aside rudely. Marian placed little Phyllis on the ground and turned to the nurse, saying: "Mrs. House, give the Yankee baby to my nurse Becky."

Mr. Blake stood by with beaming face.

"Mrs. House," he said, "this all looks strange to you, no doubt; but after you have lived among the Southerners as long as I have, you will become accustomed to see the white children kissed by their black nurses. My wife, in fact, has known no other mother than her faithful old nurse Becky,—and Mammy Sophy, who has now gone to her heavenly home. By living here you will acquire a better knowledge of the great love and devotion of the black race for the children of their former masters."

"Oh, I appreciate all that you tell me; but

I must say that it rather disgusted me to see your wife kiss that black face as she did."

"Ha, ha, ha! It may seem so to you, but I would rather see my wife kiss her old black nurse, who would give her life for her if need be, than commit the offenses I have seen some of the Northern ladies commit: kissing their dogs, for instance. After all, it is all a matter of opinion and custom. But come, let us go in."

If Mrs. House was disgusted with Marian for her attitude toward old Becky, she was more so when she entered the house and saw Becky tossing the baby up in the air and kissing it each time, with little Phyllis and Ophelia standing at her knee, calling out in high glee:

"Now it's my turn ter kiss de Yankee baby."

"I shall take that baby away at once. I cannot permit it, Mr. Blake, for another moment!" said Mrs. House, as she took the baby from Becky.

Mr. Blake went in quest of his wife, and as he turned away he heard old Becky say in an injured tone:

"Miss Marian ain't black fum kissin' her ole black nuss. Nor is little Phyllis fer kissin' me, nuther."

Ophelia remarked:

"Yo Yankee people got er mighty funny notion 'bout us niggers."

"That is all very well, my girl; but while I

am here I shall take care of the Yankee baby myself," returned Mrs. House.

"Whoopee! whoopee!" shouted Ophelia, as she took little Phyllis by the hand, and ran with her out into the garden, where they were soon happily chasing butterflies in the sweet-scented air.

Calm and peaceful now was Marian's life. Hers had been a sad experience. Ignorant of the inexhaustibleness of the world and the selfishness of her once professed friends, Marian had found so much love and sweet sympathy in her new life that her being overflowed with love for all her fellow beings.

In her sad young life she had had none to comfort and cheer her but her old black nurse and faithful Henry, who worked for her, shared their last cent with her. But at last the clouds had passed away, and the little storm-tossed bark on life's tempestuous sea had found a haven, safe within the shelter of her noble husband's love. Thus, restored to affluence such as she had known in her mother's home, she could in truth say:

"With God nothing is impossible."

THE END